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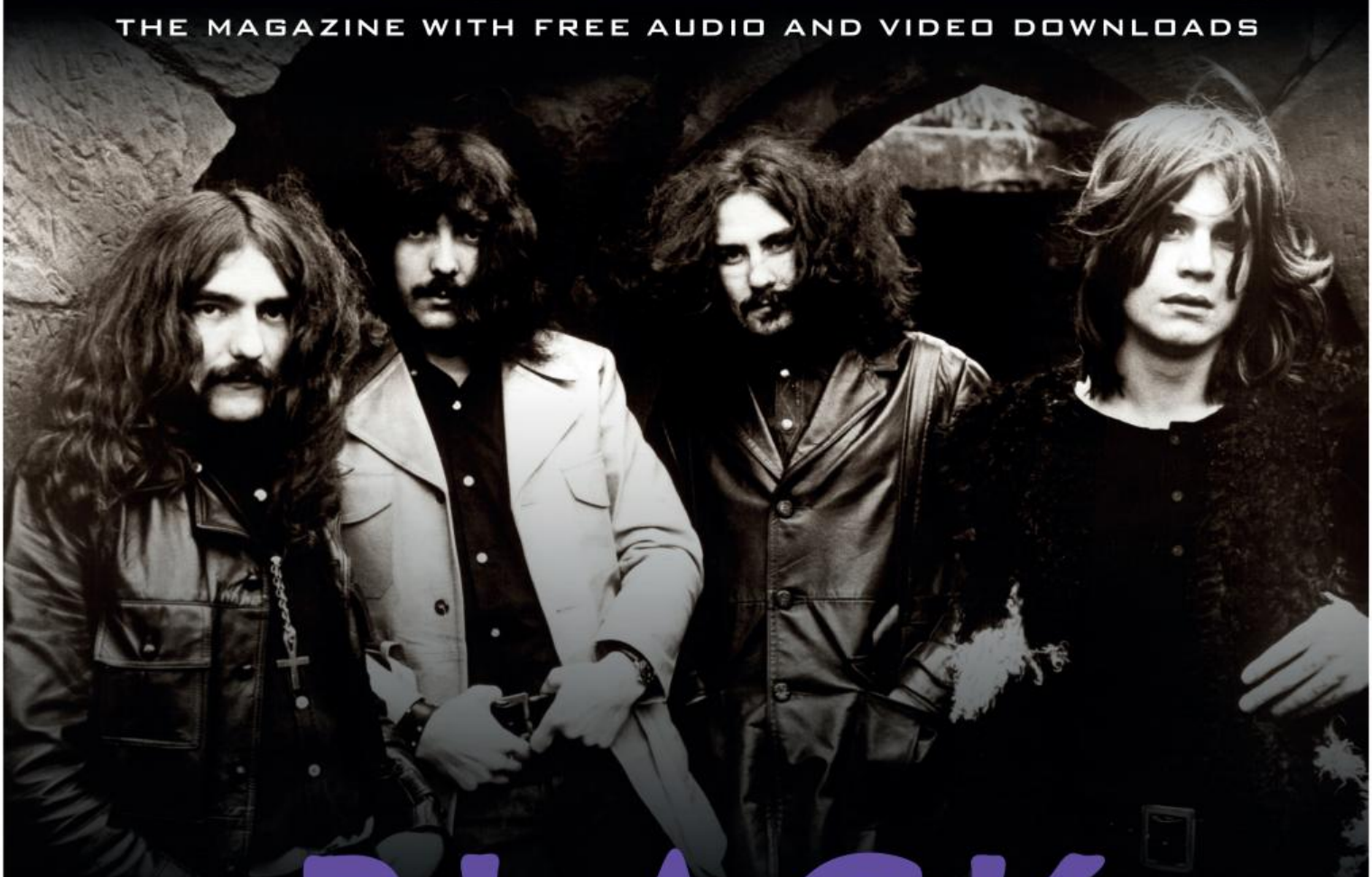

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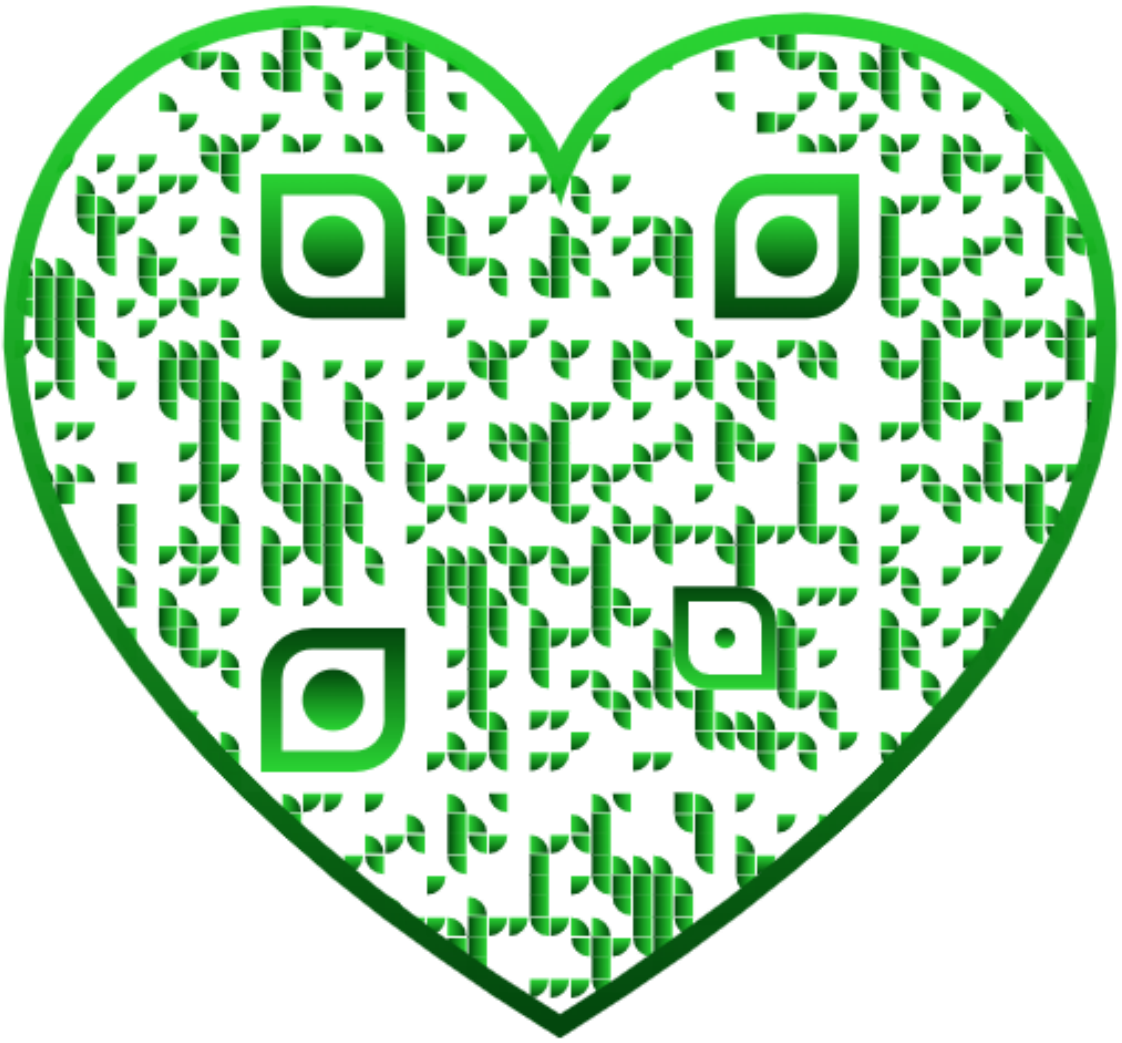

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Ozzy Osbourne Talks

to Steven Rosen

Birmingham was home to a lot of music in the sixties – The Move, the Moody Blues, Traffic, Robert Plant, John Bonham and a handful of lesser-known artists that finally came together as Black Sabbath.

John Michael Osbourne, born 3 December 1948, Anthony Frank Iommi (of Italian ancestry), born 19 February 1948, and Terence Michael Butler, born 17 July 1949, grew up within spitting distance of each other and it didn't take long for them to find each other. Unbeknown to William Thomas Ward, born 5 May 1948, was the fact that within a few miles of his own home were three other musicians each craving and searching desperately for those missing pieces that ultimately made them whole. All four had been involved in a series of bands – Bill even played 'legit' standards in his school

orchestra – but it wasn't until Ward and Iommi started an ensemble called Mythology and Ozzy and Geezer teamed up in the Rare Breed that the first real Sabbath seeds were planted. Mythology was little more than a blues band, covering standards, but generally blending in as just another one of the faceless entities Birmingham now seemed to be giving some attention to.

Mythology ran its course, after changing to The Rest, and the guitarist and drummer returned to looking for other players. In need of another singer and bassist, they found an ad in a local music paper. 'Ozzy Zig, vocalist, requires band. Owns own P.A.' Tony had attended school with an 'Ozzy' but he felt certain this could not be the same individual. Not only did he not get along with this person but this particular schoolmate couldn't sing a note.

'The three of us went there – Tony, myself, and Geez, and we knocked on the door and there he was. He had no hair (cut short), which kind of turned me off straight away because I had hair down to my backside. So he said, "Oh, I'll grow my hair out." He was looking for work, he was wanting to be singing in a band. And then I think he called himself Ozzy Zig. You know, for whatever reason. It was a really stupid advertisement. And I could remember at the time, Tony having some dread when we were arriving at the house because Tony went to school with Ozzy. So they'd known each other since they were eleven and Tony went, "I hope this isn't the Ozzy that I think it is." And it was and we were going, "Oh, no, we might as well just walk away from this straight away." Because Tony was kind of pretty handy back then; we were very rough around the edges so I didn't know if a fight was going to break out or not.'

They started jamming together, very casually, first as the Polka Tulk Blues Band (a name, for whatever reason, taken from a Pakistani clothing store), then as Polka Tulk, and finally as Earth.

'We used to jam together and play a few gigs together and we wrote original music and it worked. I had gone to school with Tony and I was working in a semi-professional group with Geezer [Rare Breed].

Then we all formed and met, and we chose Black Sabbath as a name. We didn't plan it and expect it to make such a profit as it did. It's just one of those great things in life. We tried to put music over in a different angle. It had an evil sound, a heavy doom sound. And then there were all these witches and freaks phoning us, wanting us to play at black masses and all this crap.'

In December 1969, the band signed to Philips Records subsidiary Fontana and the following month released *Evil Woman (Don't Play Your Games With Me)*. Then the album, named after the band, was released, and made it to No. 8 in the British charts. They recorded *Paranoid* and *Master of Reality* and were really seeing the rewards of success; rented estates in Beverly Hills, big album budgets, and serious ingestion of drugs.

'*Master of Reality* was the turning point. That was the last real Sabbath album as far as I'm concerned.'

Osbourne had grown so unhealthily consumed by the lifestyle, that he even invoked the idea of quitting the business entirely. Years later when his own solo career was well established, each tour was definitely and without question his last. One outing he dubbed The Retirement Sucks Tour – a nod to the inhuman wounds inflicted upon the artist by the music and its machinations and his eager willingness to rid himself of the trappings.

Master of Reality was followed by *Volume 4* and then *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, the album that turned the analogue hands of tape operators into the digital readouts of synthesisers and non-organic sounds.

'And then we started to progress into *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* where we started to get mechanical in the studio, use synthesisers, and then sort of overtracking and double-tracking and triple-tracking and backward cymbals and standing in the bathroom with a bag of coal in your mouth,' muses a none-too -amused Osbourne. 'I call it the "investigation period," that was.'

'For instance, the first albums were the quickest albums, and they were the biggest selling albums of Sabbath. The later albums took

forever to record and they didn't sell anywhere near that. There's something in that, you know? If you've got a tune and it's lively, if you work on it, it's like you have a record player and you hear the same song every minute of the day for like three months. And you'll hate it. You'll think, "Jesus Christ." At one time, every song on the radio sounded like the Eagles, and it's at a turning point where I think everybody just sort of got Eagle-itis. It's like you know, overkill.

'That was the last album we used Rodger Bain for. Then we used Patrick Meehan on *Volume 4*. But we really didn't have much to do with the production of those records anyway. Not at all. I'd be a liar if I said so. All we did was just put these cute little effects on, you pushed the buttons, and we played the music, you know? The production is one side of it but if the music is strong enough on its own anyway, it's got the vibe, it'll go anyway. All you've gotta do is get an equal balance.'

Balance is exactly what the quartet maintained during this period. There was a sharing of power, powders and passions. Ozzy, from the time he was Mr. Zig, had a unique vision of what he wanted and Black Sabbath was his birth passage into a world that allowed him to see, fulfilled, those dreams. Though he's quick to dismiss hard work as a dirty little word – two dirty little words.

'Professional? No way. Forget it. [That was] the first lunacy that I was ever involved in. It had its moments, but Sabbath became like a dinosaur, it got too big to survive. We wouldn't come down to their terms, we thought we were too good to do anything, like Zeppelin and Pink Floyd had reached that niche where they could record, and not go out on the road because they were like the invisible band. But when they came out, it was like "Phew!" Like God had arrived. Sabbath was kind of blinded by the fact that they thought they should have been there but we never quite got there because we weren't prepared to put the hours in that the other people did. Zeppelin went on the road for three years before they could even bother to do that or even afford to do that, where Sabbath went on the road for a six-week tour on, then three weeks off. We'd stop here or there, take a break. We were

the biggest hypochondriacs you'd ever met in your life. We must have spent most of our earnings on doctors' fees. It was like, "I've got a pain. Go to bed for three days." It's just indigestion from eating too much Chinese food from the night before. Or, "I've got cancer." "Sure you have." We always said, "If I die, bury me in England."

'Bill Ward used to have a bag so full [of treatments]. I mean, it got to the point that we went on the road one time and he even had a snake-bite kit. I said, "Where the hell are you ever going to see a snake? Where on this Earth are you ever going to see one? Or are you going to drive to a zoo or something?" He says, "You never know, some of these snakes run pretty fast when you're driving across the desert." [Ozzy breaks into laughter] On a 650 motorbike, in the bloody Colorado Desert? I mean, if the snake ever bit him, the snake doesn't have a bloody chance.

'We used to call him Dr. Bill and Valiums Forever. If you had anything wrong with you, you'd just go and see Bill. He had things for everything. When he came up with that snake-bite kit, it was like the ultimate. I mean I'd never seen one of those things; he had a big old razor like your dad might have, and I said, "What if it bites you up the ass, Bill?" He said, "Somebody's going to have to suck the poison out." [More laughter] I said, "Don't come to me, man. Find a new friend to help you."'

Multiple tours into the band's career, Ozzy still has some fond memories of this period. In fact, his first trip to America is what he dubs 'a great moment'.

'I suppose, when we first got to play the big arenas, it was like we went from one tour, played two nights at the Whisky [a small but famous Sunset Strip club] and then from the Whisky we went to the Forum [a huge 17000-seat facility]. But I hated playing the Forum; we hated it. It's a weird sound when you're playing on stage there."

Though Ozzy felt a warm fuzziness for the group's early albums, and sometimes trampled underfoot the progress made on subsequent albums, he likes his performance on the *Sabotage* album, and to some extent, on the *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* record as well.

'I think the music is definitely going in a better direction. When you set out to record and write an album, you never sit down and say, "Well, this is going to go this way." I think this last album is the best one we've ever done. I think it shocked a lot of people. It shocked me. As far as the strings and the bagpipes are concerned, we just tried it. We tried anything and everything. If it's good, it's good. Try anything once because it's your record.'

Trying everything was another way in which the band managed to keep egos on an even keel. Not surprisingly, it turned out that Ozzy leaned towards the very heavy material, Tony, believe it or not, was partial to the mellower sounds, Geezer shifted towards the heavy songs but with a touch of sweetness, and Bill opted for the lonely stuff.

'Tony likes mellow stuff, Geezer likes heavy but mellow combined, and Bill writes lonely stuff, very sort of sad stuff. I went to Tony's house one day and he'd done this thing on a piano and a Mellotron. It sounded like a bloody symphony. He's always piddling about in the band with a synthesiser. I believe this was *Volume 4*. That was like the beginning of a new trip for us. *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was stage two. On *Volume 4*, we opened [the audience's] eyes to what we can eventually do. It's like opening another door.'

One of these portals was opened when the band changed management from Patrick Meehan to Don Arden [Sharon's father, the woman Ozzy eventually married and is managed by]. They also switched labels, moving from Vertigo to NEMS Records in the UK while remaining on Warner Bros. in America. Around this period, Sabbath performed at the California Jam in Ontario, California, a multi-day affair capped off by the appearances of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Deep Purple and, of course, Black Sabbath. The other members of the band were reluctant to appear and Ozzy responded with an incredulous, 'You're crazy. We haven't been on the road for like three or four months. This is our only opportunity where a lot of people can see us in a short amount of time in one gig.'

They rehearsed and turned in a very strong showing, but by this time the seeds of discontent had been sewn and the band was on its last legs.

'Everyone was trying to fight everybody else, 'cause everyone didn't want to own up to themselves and say, "It's over."'

Ozzy ventured out on his own and the remaining members were angered about his seeming betrayal. For his part, the singer felt they should have shelved the name Black Sabbath, laid it to rest, and continued under a new name. In order to try and postpone the inevitable, the record company manufactured that golden panacea, the compilation album. Titled *We Sold Our Soul For Rock 'n' Roll*, this seventy-minute-plus album contained *Paranoid*, *Iron Man*, *Black Sabbath*, *NIB* and a dozen other staples.

Technical Ecstasy followed and while it wasn't a terrible record, it was really little more than a reflection of the bold and brazen and bone-breaking sounds the group had immortalised on earlier recordings.

'The last Sabbath albums were very depressing for me. It was doing it for the sake of what we could get off the record company and just get fat on beer and put a record out. Nobody was really interested in promoting it. No one was interested in getting out there and working on the road. *Never Say Die* was my last album with Sabbath. I didn't finish it, either. I just did that last record and said, "Okay," and walked out, 'cause I couldn't stand it any more. In fact, *Goodbye To Romance*, on my first solo album [*Blizzard Of Ozz*, 1981] was just about farewell to the past, farewell to Black Sabbath.'

Osbourne was temporarily replaced by ex-Fleetwood Mac/Savoy Brown vocalist Dave Walker. This never quite fell into place. The band was slated for another tour that saw them headlining over a new Los Angeles-based band called Van Halen. Around this time, Ronnie James Dio was brought in to replace Dave Walker and the final pieces were prepared for the dissolution. Ozzy, though he desperately wanted out of the situation, was scared and nervous about what he'd find out there as a solo artist.

'When I first left, I thought, "What am I going to do? Where do I go? I've never auditioned for anyone in my life." I didn't have the first idea what to do, and at that time I never had any management. You're stuck in a big cruel world and it's like, where do you go? I didn't know how to go about it.'

Management in place [handled by Sharon Osbourne *née* Arden], the singer had to confront the physical nature of his life.

'At first, I was so disillusioned and so disappointed in myself because at that time I was drinking heavily taking a lot of chemicals to get through the day, until eventually I just said, "This ain't no good; I've got to pack it in and live." And the funniest thing was that, at the time, Sabbath was being managed by Don Arden, and I thought that the company would be angry at me, but actually it was the other way around. They gave the other guys the goodbye to keep me on, which was a great, great feeling for me. I'd never been so low in my life as that time.'

In 1980, John Michael signed with Don Arden's Jet label, located guitarist Randy Rhoads, and released *Blizzard Of Ozz*, reaching the Top Ten in England landing as a No. 21 chart position in America. Cruelly, on 19 March 1982, Rhoads' life was taken in a tragic plane crash. Ozzy went through a number of replacement guitarists including Night Ranger's Brad Gillis, ex-Ratt man Jake E. Lee, a brief fling with Joe Holmes, and finally landing on Zakk Wylde, a New Jersey blues player with the look of a Norse Viking and the style of a seriously talented riff scholar.

Ozzy found extraordinary success as one of the original heavy henchmen, and MTV reality show *The Osbournes* catapulted him from rock icon to international celeb extreme.

The remaining members pursued various solo careers, performed as Black Sabbath (Tony retains ownership of the name), but none of them, either singularly or as a group, ever achieved the status they reached with Ozzy.

And what did Ozzy think of Sabbath post-Osbourne?

'To be perfectly honest – and I'm not trying to say anything against them – I didn't think it remotely resembled Black Sabbath at all. I think it resembled more Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow than it did Sabbath, with the voice [referring to Dio, of course]. It's like, if I suddenly joined Blackmore, Ritchie would sound like Sabbath because of the voice. I mean, you don't go down the road saying, "That's a great riff, it's a great drum sound or cymbal sound." You go down singing the song. If I was to join the Frank Sinatra band – it wouldn't sound like Frank Sinatra, because the voice is what you listen to.'

Geezer Butler Talks

to Steven Rosen

Terry 'Geezer' Butler, as one half of the rhythm section of Birmingham's Black Sabbath, is an unsung hero. Largely overlooked when you think of Ozzy and the riffman himself, Tony Iommi, it was Butler's very frantic fingers that filled in the holes of this heavy metal trio's music. And what many fans don't even realise is that this is the man who wrote all the lyrics, all that dark marching evil army stuff, the words to *Paranoid*, *Iron Man*, and *War Pigs*.

In Sabbath, most of the lyrics were yours?

About ninety-five percent; Ozzy came up with the melody lines, the vocal lines; for instance, *Iron Man*, he came up with the line 'iron man' so I wrote the lyrics around that subject. He used to be good at

coming up with like one line that would give you the inspiration to write the rest of the song.

You do compose on bass?

Most of the time, or guitar; I'm not brilliant at guitar so when I'm playing guitar, it sounds like bass anyway. It's all riffs, I can really only write riffs.

How do you want to be perceived on this first solo project? Did you have a lot of emotions that went unspoken within Sabbath that you now want to reveal?

Well, just the fact that I hadn't lost my enthusiasm, I hadn't lost direction, and I could do more than just play bass [laughs]. To be honest, I wasn't even thinking about it; I just wanted to get my music done. I was even thinking about putting it on my own label and distributing it myself at one point because I didn't want anyone telling me what to do. I was really frightened of record companies and I met TVT in England and they hadn't heard anything that I was doing but just said, 'We believe that whatever you do is gonna be great – or good anyway [laughter]' and just left me to it.

Do you like the feeling of being the man everyone else answers to?

Yeah, I like to have complete control over my music because it really means something when I do a song. I'm really sensitive about my music and I don't like people telling me to change this or change that. And Ozzy always kept telling me to do a solo; he says there's no feeling in the world like it because you've got total control, you don't have to deal with everybody else's egos, and have to agree with something that you don't really like. It was great to write something and have it end up probably better than you ever thought it would instead of worse and being massacred.

Has your bass playing changed on this album versus the Sabbath albums? Are you playing in a different style?

It was totally different; because I write on bass, instead of having the guitarist take over and do those riffs on guitar and then having to put the bass around what he's doing, it was like, 'This is the bass, this is the riff.' It was like going back to the old Sabbath again and *NIB* and the song *Black Sabbath*. You do the bass riff and the guitarist just plays to your bass.

Do you think Sabbath influenced other bands and the music they're now playing?

Yes, everything, the whole style of the music, the lyrical content, just the heaviness of it, the riffs, and the way the bass and guitar play together. But I like the bands who have taken the essence of it and are doing their own thing. A lot of the better bands have done that; the ones that just totally, blatantly ripped Sabbath off don't really – it's a nice compliment but they should move on from there. We did that twenty years ago.

I like bands like Metallica, Pantera and Machine Head. You can see the influences but they've done it in a totally different way.

Does this new project hold those same types of feelings you had for the early days of Sabbath?

This does, yes, this is the first album I've done for years where I've been really enthused about it and just gone in and had fun. I was almost scared to go in to see what we were going to come out with, because none of us knew what it was going to sound like because we'd never played together, we hadn't rehearsed together or anything 'cause I'd been doing the Ozzy thing. So we booked two weeks in a recording studio and just waited to see what happened. We had two days of rehearsals and did the whole album in twelve days.

How long did it take to do the first Sabbath record?

Two days but we'd had eighteen months in which to write and play together. For this, it was almost totally live; just a couple of guitar overdubs, no effects on the bass, all the drum tracks were done in two days including getting the sounds.

You mention there are no effects on the bass – how do you get a bass sound? Is it live and direct?

Yeah, well this time I wanted to get a real aggressive feel to it so I was actually using besides the bass equipment, a Marshall guitar amp as well through a Marshall guitar speaker. And some direct as well. Ampeg SVTs in the studio, 8x10s and Trace Elliott 15" but I don't use that live. I use the SVTs live but I have custom-built Marshall cabs with EV speakers.

What type of gear did you used to use with Sabbath?

Anything free [laughs]. Ampeg but then they went out of business so I switched to Crown power amps and Alembic pre-amp or Marshall pre-amp. Laney was what I started out very first using but then as the band got bigger and bigger, the Laney stuff was too unreliable so I switched to Ampeg in around 1971.

Has your sound improved? Have you learned how to develop and control your sound?

No, it's always hit and miss. The engineer I was using is absolutely brilliant at understanding what I'm trying to do because usually I go into the studio and the engineer or the producer hasn't got a clue how to get the sound that I want. Because they always think the bass should be nice and round and deep and smooth and everything else and when I tell them I want it distorted with like a really growling bottom they go, 'No, you can't do bass like that.' So it's always been a battle. Paul Northfield, who also engineered the Ozzy album, was incredible at getting the bass sound so I thought, 'He's got to do my album.'

You produced the album yourself?

I co-produced it; the technical side was all done by Paul Northfield, I just gave a yes and no, do this and do that. I didn't want everybody in the band to be putting a bit in like happened in Sabbath because everybody had their own idea of what a mix should be or what a sound should be.

Was the track *Giving Up the Ghost* the sort of eulogy for Sabbath?

Yeah, it's sort of giving up the whole thing. Originally the album was going to be called *Giving Up the Ghost* and the band was going to be called Giving Up the Ghost and the whole project was going to be called that because I was so nuts. That's how I felt about the thing at the time. It was just the disappointment and frustration and the fact that Sabbath was going on and has nothing to do with Black Sabbath apart from one member still going around calling itself Black Sabbath. When I did the last Sabbath tour, I was embarrassed that it was called Black Sabbath. You talk to kids and other musicians and they just don't have any respect for people calling themselves Black Sabbath. And people were telling that to me when I was in the band, going, 'Why the hell are you keep going on as Black Sabbath? You're not Black Sabbath.' And I realised it wasn't, it isn't Black Sabbath, it was just going down and down and down. And before the name is totally destroyed, I want to get out of this and time to give up the ghost. So, that's where that song came from.

You would have liked to have seen the name retired that last time you played with Sabbath?

It should have been retired when Ozzy left, but I think after the second version with Ronnie Dio, when that split up, that should have been it then, put it to rest once and for all.

What was it like playing with Ozzy again?

It's fun, you just go on and have fun every night because he's mental

as ever on stage. The songs are, I suppose, classic in their own right, everybody knows them. And it's great when we do the old Sabbath stuff, it really does sound like Sabbath stuff without having to call yourself Sabbath. It's great to hear him sing those things.

So there was never really any bad blood between you and Ozzy towards the end?

It's off and on between me and him; we have massive fights and don't speak to each other for two years. I've probably said at least three times, 'I'll never ever play with Ozzy again in me life' and then time goes by and we start talking and get together again. It's just one of those sorts of relationships. Weird.

How do you feel about Ozzy's new record?

That was a completely new experience for me because it's the first time I have done an album where I haven't been at the conception of it from zero to a final album. It was just like go and do bass bits and I've never done that before; it was more like a session musician. It was strange, just going in and putting your bass bits down and going home. It was good to work with Michael Beinhorn and Paul Northfield.

Do you feel any sense of the world of music being as creative and open now as it was when you first started with Sabbath?

No, it can't possibly be because there are so many bands now and the record companies, as soon as one thing becomes popular, that's all they'll sign. This so-called punk thing that's been going on, you hear Green Day, and you hear ten Green Days for the next two years. In the old days, you'd only have one Emerson, Lake & Palmer, or one Yes, or Sabbath, or one Deep Purple; you wouldn't get all these millions of everybody copying the same thing. It's a shame because there are a lot of really great bands there that are getting passed by. But some things gradually build up an underground following like Machine Head and

Fear Factory and it's healthy to see there are alternatives out there to the big business side of it.

What about bass players who influenced you?

Without a doubt, Jack Bruce; he is my idol. I never even thought about bass guitar until I went to see Cream. And I used to love McCartney but for different reasons. And then I saw Jack Bruce and something just went, 'Boinnngg' in my mind and it was like, 'That's what I want to do.' And he just like completely turned me on to what bass should do because he had a totally different style to anybody else; I just thought he was incredible and that's what got me into playing bass.

When people look back at you and your body of work, what would you like them to come away with?

I don't know, you'd have to ask them. It's really hard for me to look at myself like that!

Tony Iommi Talks

to Steven Rosen

Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi stands well over six-feet tall, an imposing figure. He plays as if he had six fingers. Which isn't bad, since several years ago the left-handed player hacked off the ends of two of them, the middle and ring fingers of his right hand. Consequently, he has had to completely alter his playing, struggling with various types of plastic tips, thimble-like coverings, which he places on the ball-ends of his fingers. Despite this almost impossible handicap, he has managed to turn this disability into a positive thing and has gone on to become one of the most distinctive, and copied, players in today's rock scene.

Iommi grew up in the tough, working-class British city of Birmingham. His first music aspiration was to bang on a drum set

but after realising he couldn't afford a kit of drums – and that playing the accordion just wasn't what he wanted – he fell in love with the guitar. 'I got a guitar for a birthday present and things just went on from there. I got a better guitar and then an even better one.'

Black Sabbath began under the name Earth in 1968, playing a fairly standard repertoire of pop and blues numbers (including Beatles covers). The story almost ended there: In 1969, Iommi auditioned for Jethro Tull and scored the lead guitarist slot. This was during Mick Abrahams' departure following his sole recording with that band, This Was, and just before the group's appearance in the Rolling Stones' *Rock 'N' Roll Circus*. Tony was featured in the filming of the project, miming Mick's guitar lines from *A Song for Jeffrey*, but left immediately afterwards.

'It just wasn't right. At first, I thought the band was great, but I didn't much go for having a leader in the band which was Ian Anderson's way. Not only that, the communication between the band members wasn't too friendly. In Black Sabbath, there's no leader – everyone does their own part.'

He swiftly returned to his former bandmates and acquired a Fender stratocaster that he plugged into two Marshall 4x12 cabinets powered by two fifty-watt tops. As the band grew in popularity, they changed from Earth to Black Sabbath (and even bopped around for a time as Polka Tulk) and adopted a more theatrical, black magic-inspired theme. The music grew in intensity and volume, and slowly Tony began adding more cabinets. The band was offered an attractive endorsement deal with Laney amplifiers and since that time Tony has been using six 4x12 Laney bottoms fed by four 100-watt amps. They are channelled by plugging Y-cords into the heads' outputs. For treble boost, he uses a Rangemaster unit that has been reworked (by the group's road crew) with extra tubes and boosters.

After using the Strat for several years, he changed to Gibson and now uses only SGs. One major alteration has been the replacement of the pickups with specially built low-feedback units. While he liked

their basic tone, Iommi felt that the standard Gibson products were feeding back uncontrollably. Other changes include the application of polyurethane to the neck to give it a lacquer-like finish that resists corrosion of the wood and helps prevent the frets from wearing down. The frets have been filed down and new metal tuning pegs (replacing the original plastic pieces) have been added. Because he's always experienced difficulty in tuning his Gibson, Tony has had several different ridges constructed. His current choice raises the strings to a higher profile than usual, but it has brought the open strings and twelfth-fret octaves into almost perfect sympathy. The bridge's height also prevents the lightweight strings he uses from constantly rattling against the fretboard. 'It's sort of an experimental guitar. Everything that can be done to a guitar has been done to this one. That's probably why I like it because I've got it exactly as I want it, apart from still having trouble with tuning.'

The change from Fender to Gibson came one night when the band was playing in Germany and one of the pickups went out on Tony's Stratocaster. Grudgingly, he snatched the Gibson that he kept on stage for such emergencies, and since that time has never returned to a Fender. The Gibson neck and fretboard appealed to him because of the ease with which he could bend notes. He now owns several Gibsons including an old Les Paul with three pickups (with the original SG shape), a newer model SG, and a Junior that Mountain guitarist Leslie West gave to him as a present.

Among his collection reside several acoustics as well including a Gibson J50 and a Guild, though he confesses that a rather messy house prevents him from making an exact inventory.

All of Tony's guitars had to be modified to accommodate his left-handedness. He now realises that when he first started, he could have probably just turned a right-hand guitar around and played it upside down (à la Jimi Hendrix). But he didn't, and how he's forced to buy a left-handed guitar or alter instruments to fit his needs. To add to his southpaw problem, he must also contend with the digital amputation

he suffered years ago. 'I can't use right-handed instruments now because I snipped the ends of my fingers off and on a Les Paul you've got to get right up to the end of the guitar on a reversed right-handed instrument to hit the strings. Not many people know about the accident. It happened years ago when I was doing electric welding. One day I had to cut this sheet metal before I welded. Somebody else used to do it but I had to do it this day because he didn't come into work. It was a faulty switch or something: Thhhhttt! I pulled it out and it just gripped the ends and pulled them off.'

As fate had it, the day of the accident was Tony's last day on the job before he was to depart for Germany with a rock outfit. Feeling completely lost, he decided to give up the guitar. One day, much later, a friend brought him a Django Reinhardt record and after hearing what the brilliant gypsy player was able to create with just two fingers (the fourth and fifth fingers of his left hand were permanently damaged in a fire), he felt rejuvenated and slowly began practising.

'I had to start all over again which was kind of a drag. I have to wear things now because the ends are so tender. It's helped me a little bit because now I use my little finger a lot.'

The 'things' he wears are mini-plastic thimbles that fit over the ends of the two digits to compensate for the loss in finger length and reach. He's tried various sorts of adapters, but hasn't really come up with any that are completely comfortable. Frustration over the accident, an ill-sounding guitar, or a poor performance used to elicit violent reactions. 'I'd get annoyed and pick the guitar up and smash it. At first people didn't realise how hard it was to learn to play like that. It involved a lot of determination and a lot of hard work and practice. It's just something I'll have to try and overcome. The accident happened over eight years ago, way before Sabbath or Tull. And when I joined Jethro they even said, "What are those things on your fingers?" When I told them, they were quite surprised to find I could play guitar with these. I've had to adopt a totally different way of playing because of these fingers. I mean, it's much easier when the flesh is there as it should

be. Instead of, say, pulling a note, I have to sort of push it up to get a vibrato. These tips are a bit clumsy and they slow me down and get in the way. I even have to wear leather on them to grip the strings.'

Tony has also had to search for strings that wouldn't clink or buzz when pushed with these synthetic fingertips. By combining Ernie Ball light-gauge strings for the first and second, and Piccato light-gauge for the remaining four, he's found a set that is comfortable for both his heavy chording and solo playing. Strings are changed twice a week and never right before a performance; he feels that leaving them on any longer causes the strings to wear out over the frets and makes them virtually impossible to tune.

A very percussive player, Tony really strikes the strings in his pick attack. He uses custom-made picks that are fashioned after normal Fender picks in shape, but which lie between the thin and medium weights in gauge.

Iommi explains that Black Sabbath tunes to a D on stage to get more depth, more bottom (a technique now followed by virtually every metal band on the planet). 'That's one of the reasons why I don't like using thick-gauge strings because when I bend the strings it'll rip my bloody fingers apart. On acoustics, I like lightweight gauge strings as well, because I can get a nice sound from them.'

On stage, his guitar volume is typically set on full because of the constant thundering chords he hammers out in order to fill up the trio sound. The SG's three-way toggle switch is placed in the up position for chording and in the treble (down) spot for soloing. In the studio he uses these same settings; the guitar, however, only runs through one 100 watt stack. For solos, he'll occasionally use a Fender amp of some sort. For recording, he'll also delve more in pedals and effects. For *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, for instance, he used a wah-wah, a Rotosound box (which creates a Leslie-like organ sound), and various other boosters and phasers.

Ronnie James Dio Talks

to Steven Rosen

Out of all the guitarists you've worked with over the years, who did you like working with the most?

Tony Iommi was really my favourite guitar player to work with. Tony didn't have a lot of preconceived notions of what it things were supposed to be like, he just kind of played. He was so capable and the sound was so incredible and he was so special and he left riffs everywhere.

Did you know in your career that you were going to have all these incarnations of bands or did you visualise that there was going to be a Dio band from the beginning to the end. Is that what you wanted?

I think our very first band was called the Vegas Kings. That was when I was about seven or eight years old, I thought that was going to last forever and I thought the next one was going to last forever, and the next one and Sabbath when we reformed and so on down the line. I thought every band was going to last for ever that's what being in a band is all about to me, you're a band. I mean, I'm not better than anybody else; all I wanted to do was play. First, I was a bass player first, and that's all I wanted to be, I didn't want to be the singer and then when everybody in the band couldn't sing well and it was my turn to be forced to try, I did that. And it was easy for me, so I became the singer, then it became after some years a choice to be made. Do you want to be the best bass player or do you want to be the best singer. I don't mean that I could have been either one of those things but at least I felt that I had to choose one or the other to do that and so I chose the singer. What that did for me, of course, was that it meant I was now able to communicate with the rest of the musicians in a way a lot of singers can't. A lot of singers are unfortunately and notoriously looked upon as being just a singer... you know, "Shut up and let us play our guitars and drums and basses." So you get that real divisiveness going on between singer and the rest of the so-called musicians in the band. So if you don't have respect for them you can't get anything out of them at all. If you can't talk in their terms, if you don't know what you're talking about you're screwed. So being a player had helped me rather a lot down the line, but the question was, did I think they were going to last forever – yes, I thought every one of them was going to last forever. Always.

What happens then?

Well you know people, attitudes change, especially in the early days. You got different platforms that people want to deal upon, you know, some are in love with their seventeen-year-old girlfriend and that's all that matters to them. Some love their cars more than they love being in a band, some need to go get a job in the local typewriter factory to be like Mom and Dad etcetera, etcetera. So society comes in and

dictates a lot of what's going to happen and then eventually you find the people who you believe are as dedicated as you are, who weeded out the girlfriend, and the car, and the job at the typewriter factory, and what society had to say, and are at the same point that you are and want to succeed as a musician.

So in the early days a lot of the things that happened were normal things that happened to people who were still growing up and then as you go along, you just start weeding out people who just don't fit the mould of what you're trying to create or what band you're in. You know, that's why people leave, if three people hate one guy, he's got to go eventually. It doesn't matter how good you might think he is, you'll tell yourself that he stinks now anyway cos we gotta get rid of this guy. That becomes just the political infighting in the music business, just as it is in politics and just as it is in the popes that are fending off a cardinal or two!

So the reason things change is mainly down to personalities, because people are volatile and people have other agendas. If we could all have the same agenda then there would never be any stopping, we would never stop. I wouldn't have time to talk to you because I'd be in the studio or I'd be on the road, I'd be playing, there'd be music coming from me all the time. But it just doesn't work that way. You come as close as you can to finding those people which I feel has happened to me now, who feel the same as I do whose only real important agenda perhaps after family, is to be a musician.

What did you think of Sabbath when you joined?

I knew that Sabbath was going to be massive, I knew we were just going to blow everybody's brains out. I could feel that when I started writing, as soon as I met Tony I knew we were going to do some incredible things, I just knew it.

Was Sabbath better than Rainbow in your opinion?

Oh yeah – you're joking!

A lot better?
Definitely...

I thought that the first Rainbow record was amazing, I thought that it was going to be a huge band.
Not here in America it wasn't. We were huge in Europe, we were massive every place in the rest of the world. Japan, huge, we played five Budokans. The first tour Rainbow ever did was there you know, obviously Ritchie had a lot to do with that coming from Purple but we had to prove ourselves. It's always one of the bands mentioned in the top three when most people who are probably a bit older obviously, you know in European top three best albums, I think that probably one of the Rainbow albums would be one of them. They just love that brand of music, they just love the kind of things that Ritchie did and they also happen to luckily, love the kind of things Ritchie and I did together. We thought classically, and Europeans have a built in classical chip in there anyway. So in America we were more of an underground band, we didn't sell a lot of places out, we had a hard time of it, we really did. The first gig we ever did was in Montreal and we played at the Forum and I think we drew about 1500 people.

It was pretty sad and Ritchie got pretty loaded for that one and I don't blame him but no, we became huge afterwards. After we broke up those first albums became huge and then as Rainbow went along it became a different band. It became a pop band but to this day the second album especially is always listed as one of their favourites, *Rainbow Rising*. My favourite was the first one always but hey, we'll take it where you can get it. No, Rainbow was a very difficult one, Sabbath was massive, that was huge.

Really?
Because it started it all over again, it began a heavy metal trend again. I seem to have been involved in a lot of time-changing periods. Rainbow was one in Europe, I mean; suddenly everyone went 'Wow what's

this?' Then we did *Heaven and Hell* and everybody went 'Wow what's this?' Then we did *Holy Diver* and everybody went 'Wow what's this?' So it was right that the attitudes happened at that time but Sabbath was the band I always knew would really show everybody. You see there was Tony, Geezer and Bill, who didn't think that was going to happen. So when it's you, the onus is on you, it's a lot more difficult to say 'this is going to do great', because you want to cover yourself in case it doesn't but when it's like kind of almost nothing to do with you, it's like, 'Well it's if I know it's going to be great but if it isn't then they're going to blame them anyway.' Which is untrue – they're going to blame me, and that was the whole point of the exercise all the way down the line whenever Tony was.

We did a show in Hawaii, the first show that Vinny ever did with us, this is after Bill had left the band. We had a commitment to go to Hawaii because we had lost so much money on the first show that Bill decided he wasn't going to do in Denver that we now had to go, if we didn't do the Hawaii show we were going to lose about $250,000 and we couldn't afford to do that. So we had to find a drummer in three days, which we did, which was Vinny and we went to Hawaii, played at the Aloha Stadium and in the dressing room Tony looked like he was going to die. I said, 'Tony what's wrong', 'I've never played with another drummer before. Oh my God what's he going to be like out there?' I said, 'Well I can tell you one thing, if we succeed they are going to think that you did the greatest job on earth, if we fail, they're going to blame me, so what are you bothering about?' He went 'Oh I guess that's probably true.' So everything worked out all right.

You mention that you were involved in these renaissances down the road there, is there still the potential for that kind of heavy, melodic rock, to come back?

I think there is a potential for that kind of thing to come back, it's got to be brought back in a different form, it's got to be brought back by younger players. I've been lucky to have been in this business as

long as I have and have those different levels of success. Most people are successful in one band and that lasts for about three years and hopefully you've made enough money and then, if you have, then you're set and if not you're just a disgruntled old man who probably peddles the mail.

I've been lucky, I've had from Rainbow, I mean, Elf when we had a lot of good success earlier. You know from Rainbow, to Sabbath, to Dio, to Sabbath again, to you know. I'm lucky, I've had my fifteen or twenty years of good success. I look at the world for what it really is, it's realistically, rock and roll is still young music being played for and by young people. They don't want to see their dad playing music for them and I understand that but that doesn't mean that you still can't make good music. That still doesn't mean that there aren't people out there even though they don't have a chance to hear it because there's no radio outlet anymore or not many media outlets anymore, it doesn't mean there aren't still people who don't like what you do. It's just a shame that we're not fifteen years younger! But you know it's hard to create that next thing when you're not among the people, so to speak. When you're not one of them, they want to hear it come from someone else, so that's why I'm hoping that what we do will help a little bit, that you know, people will realise that you can still be traditional but you can also take some stuff forward, but as far as us doing it, it would be wonderful to think that way but, I'm a realist. I don't think so, I think we'll do what we do and I think we'll be happy doing what we do and proud of what we do and we can play for a long time and as long as I can sing for a long time in a big place, a small place, a medium place, it doesn't matter to me.

The arena has never mattered to me, it was kind of a perk, you know, gee we're playing this place with 100000 people, wow, that's amazing. I just got through playing somewhere with 300 people, that's incredible. So it doesn't matter, you just keep your head screwed on and deal with the world as it comes to you, and you should be all right. Don't let the ego get in the way and that's probably something that

I've always been accused of – he's an egotistical little bastard – that's absolutely untrue. I mean, I may have an ego about what my talent is worth, I think everyone has to, and I know I'm good at what I do but as far as an ego and letting it step on other people, no, I would never do that. I'm the most giving, caring person that, my attitude is always the band, the band, the band, it's never me, me, me, it's always we, we, we, us, always that.

It's difficult, for example, all the Ozzy lovers, you know when I joined that band well they became Dio haters, you know, it's just the way it became and legends perpetuate themselves. I see on this Sabbath compilation kind of things, I see where they mention everybody and an editor said 'at this time Ronnie was blah, blah...' and they even refer to him as little Hitler, I mean really? Couldn't I have been little Napoleon or little Caesar? I mean it had to be little Hitler, I mean come on, of all people; I mean I'm nothing like that. So you know, that's maybe why I find I have to defend myself sometimes. I think that's just ludicrous, how can you say something that bad about somebody, especially in print, but they're stupid people they have a tendency to let revenge get ahead of their sensibility sometimes and that's one of the reasons that Sabbath fell apart, a lack of communication.

Do you have any dialogue with Tony or Ritchie or any of those people any more?

Only through other people you know, 'tell Ronnie I said hello' or 'tell Tony I said hello', I speak to Geezer once in a while, so I have a connection with Geezer but not a lot of connection with Tony and Ritchie. My connection with Ritchie has been non-existent for a long time but recently I've heard a few grumblings, people have said, 'Oh Ronnie, Ritchie said to tell you that....' He should have no reason to dislike me any more than I should have any reason to dislike him because Ritchie and I were always of the same mind . He was the guy who I was playing with and believed in the same music I did at that time, it's just that we never really carried on, we never progressed. As

far as I was concerned the band was regressing, not progressing. We got a lot of tools there but the band became, live especially, rather dissatisfying, it was always a solo for Ritchie to begin, a solo in the middle, a solo at the end every song. Then after a while, even the laziest of people are probably going to want to do some work and I'm not lazy and I want to sing all the time, I saw no sense in it.

I think it was probably a lot of people breathing into his ear that the material we were writing was probably too fantastical and that it needed to be love song based. So when we made like our fourth or fifth change of personnel while I was still there, which became Roger Glover, Roger came into the band then. So Bob Daisley was gone and David Stone was gone, Cozy was still there and Roger came to me one day and said, 'Do you think we should try to write some songs more about relationships?' and I said, 'No, I don't think so Roger, I think maybe you should go tell your man that.' So that was the end of it, right there.

That was it?

Yeah. I wasn't going to write love songs, it's not what I do, it's not what I ever wanted to do; I'm sorry, I'm not going to do it. So they became to me the band that I never wanted to be in, that was the band that started to do not only the love song-y kind of things, the relationship songs but were actually doing songs written by other people. My pride was always, hey, we'll write it because we create even if we made a bad one, at least we did it all by ourselves. That was the best thing to happen for me because it led me into the next step, which was the perfect position, for myself. But as far as having anything to do with Ritchie, it was still a matter of choice.

I've always deferred to Ritchie because he was always famous and brilliant before I was and so I always deferred to him. He was always more the master and me the pupil. So to this day I've always said if Ritchie wants to talk to me and say hello to me that would be fine with me, nothing will change, I'll be the same person I was then and

I won't treat him any differently. He was a good friend and I think he knows that, he appreciated my intelligence, he appreciated the fact that I could speak for him. Quite often Ritchie wouldn't do interviews because he was afraid he would get all caught up sometimes, so he used the lead singer or other people to speak for him, just as he let Roger do that for him too. So again I always deferred to him and if he wants to speak to me, fine, if he doesn't I'm not going to call him and go 'Hey Ritchie, how you doing?' Because at the back of mind I always think that he'd think I was looking for a gig, and the last thing I'd want to do would be that. If I could have a conversation with him that could be prefaced by 'Ritchie this is Ronnie, and I don't want anything to do with Rainbow, and I don't want to be in your band and I don't want a gig, I'm just calling you because I just want to say hello". But then what do you say, once you've said, 'Hi', 'Hello'.

Our point of reference is what happened twenty-five years ago, not what is today that's why you normally stay really tight with the people you're playing with because that's your point of reference. When the others go away, some you keep in touch with, but what do you have to share with them? So you know, Ritchie and I could talk about the old days but that's not going to get us very far. Tony and I, luckily we got back together so we had created some new things to talk about but again, I probably defer to the rest because I wouldn't want them to think in any shape or form that I was wanting to do anything with them again.

So why didn't the Sabbath thing last?

Well I thought that was going to last forever too, I would have been very happy if we could have ended our careers with maybe ten years down the line because I loved playing with them. They were great people but at the end of the day it was a matter of communication. In actuality we were booked to play here in Los Angeles and that booking got cancelled in deference to opening for Ozzy at two shows in Costa Mesa, which I refused to do. I said, 'You giving up already

or something – is there more to this than I see, like maybe a reunion guys?' I said, 'No I'm not going to do it, I gave up my band because I believed in this one.' And I said, 'I don't want no part of being the opening act especially to one who has said nothing but bad things about Tony and me, I didn't want to be part of it.' Lets face it, it was all in the works, it was going to be a reunion wasn't it, no matter what we did. So I did three months on the road, and then two weeks before the three months we were supposed to do the Costa Mesa show they came and said, 'You are going to play these shows aren't you?' Jeez, they'd had three months of me telling them I'm not going to bloody do it, get the picture, you know, find somebody else. So they finally got Rob to do it and it was so important for them to do the show to announce the reunion that was the whole point of it all, which they did, which never happened and you know we were right back where we started from.

So that's why I had wanted nothing more to do with it. I had my principles no matter what I'm supposed to be. I believed in that band, I didn't want to be under anybody else's banner. We had proven ourselves with what I thought was a hell of a good album with Dehumanizer a really, really excellent album, that only could have got better with the next one and the next one, instead they gave it up for the lure of money again, and as usual it turned into shit because people lied to them and someone just broke that band up very conveniently.

So do you sense a reunion with Ozzy and Tony in the imminent future?

No, no. A bit late I'd say, you know, what have they got to offer? They didn't have anything to offer when they did *Technical Ecstasy* or *Never Say Die*, it was over then, they weren't writing together, I mean, what kind of writing could be done? Somebody's going to have to write for them and if anyone does that then it's not the reformation of Black Sabbath as I see it. That band was what Geezer wrote and what Tony wrote and what Ozzy claimed he wrote but Ozzy's performance and

the whole band's performance where what made them happen when we were doing *Iron Man* and *Black Sabbath* and those great songs, but to do it now?

I mean Ozzy's become something different, I mean, he's become a crossover artist now, so he's going to be able to go back and do that? Well if he does and is successful well good for them but I'll look at it and go 'what a load of crap', because to me there's no such thing. That's why I felt that the *Dehumanizer* album we did made sense because it was a lot more progressive album; it had more progressive ideas inside it, it wasn't the same old album. Don't you want to listen to what's out there around you, do something different with it, create some waves, kick somebody in the balls and make them go 'OOF' instead of 'Oh I'm so happy and sleepy', you know. I guarantee that they'll do it because of the almighty buck, or the almighty pound whichever currency or Deutschmark they want to trade in these days is going to be there for them and they'll go for the bucks. I'll guarantee you that, but I just always think that those are the wrong reasons for doing things.

Unless you can take it to the other step, then it's the wrong reason for doing it, I mean, I'd do a reunion if it was the right one, and if the money was there then that's fine but you do it for the right reasons; it would be a great project.

Glenn Hughes Talks

to Steven Rosen

Well let's start at the beginning. In 1970 I was playing with Trapeze. Sabbath had just released *Paranoid* I believe and Trapeze had just started to make their first record *Medusa*, and we'd been touring America and we'd started to get a following in England. A major venue in England in the seventies was a place called Mothers in Birmingham. I remember on occasions that we played there maybe three times a year and I did see Tony and Geezer in the audience checking out Trapeze.

Really?

In Birmingham at the Top Rank Ballroom on some Christmas holiday I think it was 1971 or something; anyway, I didn't see Tony

and Geezer and Bill and Ozzy again until California Jam in April 1974 when they opened up for us.

At this time I became friendly with Ozzy and Tony. Ozzy was staying at the Beverley Wilshire and I was staying there for a month in August 1974. We hung out a lot and had a great time. I remember a time Sabbath had gone through a management problem with Patrick Meehan and Ozzy would come down and tell me about his distress with that. His real name is John Osbourne...

John?

Yes, he lived in Staffordshire where I was born, and lived on a farm with his first wife Thelma and they would invite me to come over and I went out with them a few times. In fact I remember a funny story, I was going to buy a car from Ozzy, a Jaguar, and I pulled into the driveway and as I was pulling in he was pulling the car out, and he smashed it into one of his other cars, which I thought was hilarious. He's a character. Ozzy is a great guy, I really do like Ozzy a lot. With Tony, Tony is more of a shyer person. But yes, I do have fond memories of the time when I was in Deep Purple and we spent some time with Sabbath.

The California Jam show was crap...

It was a great show for Glenn Hughes and Deep Purple and as you know a lot of people play that bloody thing and they go 'What a great gig for Glenn Hughes that was.' It was a great showcase for me so I'm glad people remember it. In fact the whole time with Purple for me was great. So the Cal Jam was a big one for us. Over the years Bill, Tony, Geezer and Ozzy have been friends of mine because we all grew up in the Midlands together and I do have a lot of time for guys from the Birmingham area. I just think they are the salt of the earth, I love them. It was Ozzy that I started hanging out with in 1981 when he was first with Sharon, Sharon was managing me when I was working with Gary Moore.

So I was up at Sharon's house a lot and Ozzy was living up there, and we had some fun together. In fact, going back to 1977 when Ozzy had left Sabbath the first time, he wanted me to form a group with him.

Really?

I had to decline because I'm a singer and Ozzy's a singer and it really wouldn't have worked. I thought we were too good friends to form a group together anyway. Anyway, moving to the time when I got a call from Tony Iommi in June of 1985.

He said he had started a solo album and it was his intention to have three different singers on this album. I think he wanted, myself, Rob Halford and Ronnie to do the vocals, and Tony asked me if I would come down and help write lyrics and help participate in the writing of the lyrical side of the album and sing three songs. The nemesis of the whole thing was myself and Tony, Dave Spitz on bass, Eric Singer on drums, Geoff Nichols on keyboards and the producer was Jeff Glixman. The studio was Cherokee and I think in July 1985 I went down there. Tony said would I do three songs and I remember the very first evening I was there I wrote two right away, *No Stranger to Love* and *Danger Zone*. It became apparent to Tony I guess, and to the rest of the guys, that I was really doing a good job but you must remember, that this was a Tony Iommi solo project, it wasn't Black Sabbath. The idea of me being in Black Sabbath didn't appeal to me whatsoever.

I want to make it clear that before Deep Purple and before Sabbath, I was in Trapeze and I was a very funk, hard rock, soulful, group singer. I wanted to get away from the stereotype heavy metal image that I had in Purple. So I wasn't really interested in anything metal, or dark, 'cause I'm a Christian and I've always been a Christian, but we know about the alcohol and the drugs, but that's another story. I didn't really feel comfortable singing dark stuff, I never have done.

We recorded the album under the Tony Iommi name and it was done, and I was the guest vocalist and I participated in writing lyrics, and the melodies and working with Tony Iommi quite closely. I do

remember very clearly that there were problems making the record. Tony was going through a divorce at the time, he was dealing with that. They gave me a lot of room to write and sing on the record, and I was working with Jeff Glixman – an old comrade of mine.

After the record was done we moved to Atlanta, Georgia on 24 August 1985. I remember that clearly because on the 25 August I met Christine, a girl I had a ten-year relationship with up until this year. I met her in Atlanta and I do remember the time very clearly, because I was very much in love with Christine, and it helped me to focus more on making the Sabbath record. She liked being in Atlanta. I liked it there and I really enjoyed singing that record. A lot of my fans, a lot of Glenn Hughes fans liked the record but a lot of the Sabbath fans, its not very dark, its not a dark album, its Glenn Hughes singing with Black Sabbath if you will.

But getting back to the title of the album, when we did the album, the album was mastered, mixed, it was all done, artwork ready to go and then Don Arden and Warner Brothers thought that maybe we should call it Black Sabbath featuring Tony Iommi which I wasn't really too happy with. Although I had no say in it and then they asked me if I would actually be a part of touring with Black Sabbath. Getting back to the record, I thoroughly enjoyed making the album, I liked working with Tony. It was a nice time, we spent about two months making the album, it was great. At this time in my life I was still using drugs and alcohol but when I did go in the studio to sing I never was under the influence, I would try and not use.

Was Tony getting high then?

You know Steve, let's talk about that. We can talk about that, for me, talking about my recovery and alcoholism and drug addiction is easy to do. But there's been so much written on me about that, I think we should, if you want to, you know, sugar things up, that's fine, but there were drugs being taken. I don't feel it would be good for me to say who's doing it, but if they said I was doing it, it don't matter.

No he spoke about it a lot, you know, I only asked because maybe it was part of the process of making music…

There were drugs; there was a lot of pot and a lot of coke, and there was a lot of drinking, but I never used whilst I was actually on the microphone. I don't think anybody can do that, but you must remember this once again too that this was a period in my life which really wasn't a happy period for me. In fact the eighties were a bad time for Glenn Hughes, spiritually and musically and whatever mentally. But I got through the album, I really enjoyed it and they asked me to participate in touring with them, and I didn't really want to do it.

In fact, I didn't want to do it at all. But at that time I just thought I'd better get a manager and the manager I chose was Noel Monk.

Noel was my tour manager in Trapeze in 1971 so I chose Noel and things went from bad to worse. Noel had just got off the thing with Roth and Van Halen, and he was riding high and doing his deal and he wanted things doing his way. I was a control freak and wanted things doing my way and I do remember having a very short relationship with Noel because we got into a fight over the phone and we parted company. I have a lot of respect for Noel; I haven't seen him in a long time I'm sure he'll be happy to know that I'm in recovery.

How much different was it working with Tony as opposed to Ritchie?

Well I think everybody in the industry and every fan that reads about Purple will understand that Ritchie Blackmore is an incredibly talented guy who has a very hard time expressing himself to another human being. On a musical level and especially on a personal level, the man is without love. He is everything you've ever read about him, and this is for the people who are reading the book, it's true, the guy is a pretty evil cat. He's never really happy unless things are going his way and if things were going very, very well, if I had a really good night in Purple like Cal Jam, he'd make a point of saying, you can't have too many more nights like that. He's notorious for pulling the rug from

under you. I forgive and forget, that's the kind of person I am. I haven't spoken to Ritchie in a long time. A funny story is that a few years ago I was working with my group in Oslo, and Purple were in town and my band were playing at a gig after Purple and one of the Purple fans ran into Rich in the lobby and said 'Oh are you going to see Glenn after?' And he said, 'Glenn, Glenn who?'

Tony Iommi is very quiet, very shy, I think Tony is a very, very underrated writer. We all know about his guitar playing but he's a great writer. In fact moving forward a bit, when I saw Tony at the Crane awards, he asked me to do another album with him. Not under Black Sabbath of course, I wouldn't do that but you know I'd work with Tony again. Anyway, let's talk about that bloody, this is going to be a part of the book that will be good. You probably heard a few stories about this; let me tell you the story I have. January 1986 the Alley rehearsal studios on Lankershim Boulevard...

Black Sabbath, the name Black Sabbath the group, started rehearsal. Tony and I decided that I would put the bass down and I would be the lead singer for Black Sabbath. This was a horrifying thought for me because here I am, trying to break away from this Deep Purple, heavy metal God, singer guy that people think is Glenn Hughes. I'm having to sing, I'd say, seventy-five percent of the songs in the show which I'd say are Ozzy and Dio songs. Now lets talk quickly about Ozzy and Dio, Ozzy Osbourne, lets talk about the singing voices of Dio and Ozzy. It wasn't so hard singing the Dio stuff, but it was really, really hard singing Ozzy Osbourne songs because nobody sounds like Ozzy. I've got a lot of character to my voice, and a lot of depth and soul and Ozzy, bless him, is a very monotone singer and it works for Ozzy Osbourne.

Ozzy Osbourne is Ozzy Osbourne and it works for him. Can you name anybody that tries to sound like me? You can't do it, you know and for Glenn Hughes to sing *War Pigs* is an absolute crime!

You couldn't point a gun at gunpoint and make me sing that song again and in fact one night I forgot the bloody words to it, and it

was in Detroit and the crowd went crazy, they never forgave me, but anyway we did a six week run rehearsals up until the end of February in the Alley Studios, 5 days a week, 5–6 hours a night.

And my voice was absolutely rocking, it was kicking ass, TASCO was doing the sound for me again, I love those guys. We were getting along fantastic. Tony had always in the back of his mind, doubts about Glenn Hughes as the lead singer for Black Sabbath, I think we both knew it wasn't going to work, but Tony, bless him, was a great guy and he wanted the best for me and he wanted the best for himself and Sabbath. Remember Black Sabbath was then and still is, his baby now, its Tony's band. He wanted Glenn Hughes to be the best that I could be, well the best that I could be, at the time wasn't as good as Tony wanted me to be, I just wasn't into the project. I was into the Tony Iommi project, but I wasn't into the Black Sabbath moniker. So we did a 6-week rehearsal and I was very satisfied with it, we started to get some songs ready, some new songs and the old songs and we thought we had a pretty decent show. And then we had a few days free, then we had the normal production pre-production rehearsal, dress rehearsal for the press. We had that at Lucille Ball's place down near the old Desilu studios, you know.

This is very, very clear to me, Christine, my girlfriend, was with me of course and her mother was in town and we were out at the Cat and Fiddle and I was with Christine and her mother Carol and John Downing was the production manager of the tour. John Downing was the guy I've known since 1970 when he worked for the Move. Roy Wood and John Downing has been a key figure in the Birmingham scene for years and years and years. Later that evening after numerous pints of beer had been consumed back at the hotel, I started getting agitated and John Downing tried to intervene between myself and another person who I was talking to. He started getting very heavy with me and I pushed him and he hit me, and this very important for the book, he hit me so hard in the face with his fist. I don't know what the name of the bone is, but he knocked that, splintered it, it went into

my nose, the right hand side it went straight through, ok? I went to the hospital and they said that couldn't do anything with it right then, that they had to wait for the swelling to come right down. This is 4 days before the bloody first gig. So the night of the dress rehearsal I've got a bloody shiner! So the make up girl comes down and she covers me up with this and that and the whole band is in stitches, they think it's hilarious. I think, I said to Don Arden the manager, "who in hell is gonna hit the lead singer of a group the day they go on tour?"

Anyway I don't think I deserved to have been hit in the face, maybe I deserved another penance but not that. I've never actually been hit in the face, and I hope I never am again because it's not very comfortable. So there we are with John Downing hit me, and he never did apologise for that. I went on to the dress rehearsal, but I did feel uncomfortable in my throat because now we have a singer who has blood dripping into his throat and I'm coughing this blood up. Now if I remember correctly, that was a Friday evening at the dress rehearsal and the first gig was the next Thursday in Cleveland around 21 March 1986. I have a very great memory of all this shit, I went to Cleveland and I was ready to go, I was pumped up and we went to do a sound check in Cleveland, the Music Hall, and I could feel my voice, throat, my state of mind and my nose was not in any shape to do this gig.

Half way through the very first show the very first gig of the Seventh Star Tour, I knew, I knew that I wouldn't be doing many more shows. We did Cleveland and then we did four gigs at the Meadowlands. I felt an unease backstage, I felt that something was going on and lo and behold... The Meadowlands was a very big gig for me and the band, and for those people who are reading the book and who saw me on the tour, I want to apologise. But I was trying my best and I could barely talk, I couldn't even talk. It wasn't the fact that I couldn't sing; it was the fact that I couldn't sing because I had a medical problem in my throat, it was the nose problem. But anyway, to all those people that bought tickets for me, I can promise you that if they see me again I will be singing my ass off.

But anyway, the next night at a gig in Massachusetts, after the show I noticed that the opening band Anthrax had this guy with them, this really good-looking guy with long hair, sort of like a young Glenn Hughes, if I may be so bold. After the gig we had a bit of a thing in somebody's room and I was up there, and a girl that was in a band that was playing in town that night, came up to me. She introduced me to Ray Gillen and she said to me, 'Glenn I would like you to meet your replacement, Ray Gillen.' I went 'What?' and Ray, unbeknownst to me, he, yes he, was my replacement. But he was an absolute massive Glenn Hughes fan and, of course, what they had been doing after the first gig in Cleveland, was Tony and Don Arden knew that I wouldn't be able to do the tour, they just knew it. They had called Dave Spitz, and say, I know a guy in New York who probably could jump in after the Worcester gig and maybe fill in the tour. So they had been rehearsing with Ray at sound checks in the afternoon and on the bus, and they were waiting for my voice to just fall apart. And I do remember very clearly, yes I was introduced to my replacement, Ray Gillen, and I was very pissed off. So I stormed down to Tony's room and Geoff Nicholls's room, and Beast's room, and Eric's room. I banged on their doors and shouted 'Would somebody come out and tell me what's going on?' And to this day nobody ever did tell me.

You know, there's one part we've missed out. After the John Downing incident in the face, they hired me a bodyguard to protect myself from myself, and this guy was with me in the next room everywhere, in the hotel, in LA and everywhere else. The guy's name was Doug Goldstein, of course Doug Goldstein now manages Guns N' Roses, but Doug Goldstein in the early-eighties and I think, in the mid-eighties was probably the very, very best bodyguard in the rock industry you could hire. Whilst I was with Doug Goldstein, I was behaving myself very well. You have to respect him, he was a very, very good bodyguard and actually a very, very polite, kind man; everybody respected Doug. So when the incident with Downing happened Doug was asleep but Doug didn't get a lot of sleep after that! He was great,

I just wanted to mention him in the book 'cause he was paramount in my recovery too. I respect Doug for his respect for people who get clean and sober. So there we have it, we have the problems with my throat, with my nose, which no one really knew about. Some people heard that I couldn't sing, I want them to know why. For anybody who read that I was using a lot of drugs on the tour, there were no drugs, I never used any cocaine on those few gigs. I drank vodka and cranberry juice to ease my nerves before the show because, as I said to you, the idea of Glenn Hughes fronting Sabbath was like James Brown in Metallica. In fact on the very first gig in Cleveland while singing the song *Seventh Star*, while walking down the ramp behind Tony, I was making my usual R&B stabs in the songs like I do – ad libs. Tony said to me, 'Don't you ever sing like that in Black Sabbath again' 'cause I sing like Glenn Hughes, I don't sing like Dio or Ozzy and I'm doing my R&B inflections. It just didn't work, but it was nice to work with Tony.

Ozzy Osbourne isn't one of the great singers of our time, but Ozzy Osbourne is a character who portrays his songs into his images very, very well, and Ozzy is a brilliant vaudeville entertainer. Ozzy Osbourne is Ozzy Osbourne, and you cannot replace Ozzy Osbourne. You can find better singers, but you can't replace that man in that group. So anybody that tries to fill that position is going to have a hard time, especially with the fans. Because Ozzy is the heavy metal front man. You had guys like David Lee Roth who are more over the top than Ozzy, but Ozzy was a great, and still is; I love him to death. So you have the Gillens, and the Dios, and the Hugheses all coming in to fill these things. It's not going to work, especially with someone like Glenn Hughes, who has no business singing that kind of music at all. I'll have to say, if there's one dark time in my career in the last twenty-five years that I would like erase, it would be the Black Sabbath period.

But I would like to say for the record that I did enjoy making *Seventh Star* with Tony Iommi but I would like to erase that whole, dark, period on the road with the incident with the fight. The end

of the matter was in Worcester the next day, when I did go to see a doctor about my nose. I spent the night in Worcester Hospital having surgery on my nose and my throat to take away all the excessive blood and blood clots but these are things that my fans, or the readers of this book never knew that I had to go through surgery to get my voice, my throat and my nose in order again. I couldn't speak to anybody for three months; I had to write messages to people.

So to those people who have a problem dealing with that, that's the story of why I was replaced in Black Sabbath, because it was a medical thing and I must say that Ray Gillen probably did a fine job of replacing me. Of course Ray is no longer with us, he passed away. One antidote to that story, is that when Ray did pass away in November 1993, I was asked by his family to help and I did a benefit concert for him in February 1994 in New York.

When he passed away he was thirty-four or something, he passed away from AIDS, but when he died I was assured by his family that it wasn't AIDS and Ray was in the hospital. In fact I spent a lot of time post-Sabbath with Ray in my home in LA here. Ray was coming to me for spiritual guidance all the time, he thought that I was a spiritual God to him and I used to love giving him that back. We wouldn't really talk about music a lot; we'd just talk about spirituality. Unbeknownst to me he was dying from AIDS, now Ray didn't disclose this to me or anybody else except obviously, his mother and his uncle, who also died apparently of AIDS. Now when I put the show together for the Ray Gillen tribute in New York, it was the worst snow storm in the history in New York, but we had about 500 people, it was great. Now I'm on the stage with Ray's mum and the room was abuzz with the AIDS thing and we had an AIDS stall set up there but I still was in denial that Ray had passed away from AIDS. So, I was on stage saying that Ray didn't die of AIDS and all the time he did. I made comments to the press that Ray didn't die of AIDS and Tony Iommi faxed me and said that he did, so I had to retract that. I found out from a doctor some reports that Ray had died of AIDS and he was in denial

of the disease. I think its awful...yes it is awful that we've lost a lot of people like that but he was a great singer. His dream was to sing on a record with me, which he did with me in 1988 called *Phenomena*, *Phenomena 2* it was called.

Is that one of your records?

It was one of these guest albums, you know, everybody joins in and he did that with me we did a song called *Surrender*. I miss him dearly he was a lovely, lovely man. Looking back on the whole Black Sabbath thing, I want to wish them all well. The theory I have, getting back to that thing about the Gillens and the Dios and the Hugheses – we all did reasonably well in Sabbath. But there's only one Sabbath and that's Geezer, Tony, Bill and Ozzy. I hope that they can put that together because I'd like to see, I think the fans deserve another big tour from them. I wish Tony all the best in any incarnation of Sabbath he does but from my point of view, I really shouldn't have been in the group because I had no business being in the group. I did it more as a favour to Tony and as a stepping block for me to do something else.

Was there much money around then? In those days? Getting something like that?

I was paid a pretty average sum to do it. But I was paying out for a load of lawyers and managers and all that stuff. So there wasn't really much money to be made in the end. So of course I don't mind saying that the publishing side of it was all fucked up because, you know, the people who Tony Iommi was dealing at the time made sure that nobody made any money but them and him. I wrote a lot of those lyrics. It says additional lyrics by Glenn Hughes, but you can say that ninety-percent of those lyrics are written by Glenn Hughes but I let it go, I've moved on with my life. Next can we talk about my recovery?

Absolutely...

I'd like you to put this in the book because it's good for me it helps me

grow. For a number of years I was addicted to cocaine and alcohol and I consider myself to be one of the few who had the vision and insight to have the power inside of me to admit to myself that I was sick. And I entered the Betty Ford clinic in Christmas 1991 and the moment I entered the clinic I surrendered. I just couldn't put another drink or drug in my body and I haven't done that in years, and that to me is... people say to me, 'How's your career doing?' My career is great, but my real first career, the only career I have is my recovery. On a daily basis I must attend meetings I must work with other alcoholics who are suffering. I like to help youngsters who have cocaine problems, talk to them. I just wanted people to know that I came from a drug culture, and it's worse now you know, and it was very accessible to do cocaine in the early seventies; I just couldn't stop until 1991. But I have the same gusto to stay clean and sober that I had to go out and get drunk and fucked up.

I've got the great pleasure to announce to you and to everybody else that I don't foresee me ever going off the deep end because I have a wonderful life now – I have a great solo career, I'm touring the world, I'm making records, I have a great relationship with my mother and father, who have been instrumental in my recovery (I'm the only child.) My mother and father have been instrumental in helping me in recovery, they've been very, very good and I spend lots of time with them. Because when I was using drugs I couldn't go back to England a lot, and England's my home, I couldn't go back there because I didn't want them to see their son as I was, so now we spend as much time together as we can.

Up Close and Personal

from Rock's Backpages

Black Sabbath

Steve Turner, Unpublished, March 1970

© Steve Turner, 1970

2003 Note: Having written my very first article for the *Beatles Monthly* I was asked by the publisher, Sean O'Mahoney (aka Johnny Dean), to contribute to another of his publications, *Beat Instrumental*. It was a great offer but I was living in a small Midlands town where the opportunities to interview the good and the great were rare. But on 26 March 1970, Black Sabbath, who had just released their first album, came to play at the school that was directly opposite my family home. At the time the music

papers were drumming up publicity about them as 'devil rockers' and they seemed to be symptomatic of the loss of hope in the sixties dream of 'love and peace' and also of the fall-out of the drug culture. My interview with Black Sabbath was the first I'd ever conducted. I took notes as I had no tape recorder and can remember standing with them in the school cloakroom as they got ready to go on stage. I wrote up the short piece a week later and sent it to *Beat Instrumental*, but it was never used. A year later I became the Features Editor of the magazine.

Ozzy Osbourne is the lead singer of Black Sabbath, a heavy rock group with a new LP in the charts. He can also claim to be an instrumentalist because he plays harmonica. He leads on vocals during my interview with the four group members.

'You're going to ask about black magic,' he says, anticipating my line of questioning. 'It's rubbish. Geezer wrote a song called *Black Sabbath* and at the time we were called Earth but were constantly being confused with another group with a similar name and so we changed to Black Sabbath."

Geezer is Geezer Butler. He writes the words and plays bass guitar. 'We were trying to get away from traditional boy-girl lyrics,' he explains. 'I began to explore the supernatural as a source of subject matter. When I write I want it to be an interesting experience for me as well as, eventually, an interesting experience for those who listen.'

Tony Iommi plays lead guitar. One music paper spread the rumour that Eric Clapton had played on Black Sabbath's debut recording but was later forced to phone Mr Iommi with an apology. Still, to have your playing confused for that of Clapton's is no bad start to a career. Iommi reckons that the group has already moved beyond where they were when they cut Black Sabbath. 'The songs on the LP are representative of us nine months ago,' he says. 'We recorded them six months ago.'

Bill Ward plays the drums. He learned his craft on a set of drums left at his home when he was a child. He's been a professional musician

for four years but has periodically been on the dole. He relaxes by listening to the likes of Buddy Rich. When success came to Black Sabbath he says he wasn't at all surprised because he had long felt that this line up was fated for great things.

The music of Black Sabbath is heavy, raw and doom-laden. It sounds like inner city Birmingham converted into musical notes. The life that the four men had laid out before them was one in which a third of the time would be spent working in a factory, a third playing darts in the pub and the other third exhausted in bed. It was a life expectation that they wanted to avoid. Music seemed to offer the most feasible escape route.

Iommi and Butler have worked together for five years, forming Earth a sixteen months ago when they met up with Butler and Osbourne. They've played the Star Club in Hamburg, home of the Beatles back in the days before *Love Me Do*, and they have built up a large following in Europe.

They are already preparing for a summer tour of America and say that they're hoping that it'll be the music that'll bring in the fans rather than the associations with the world of darkness. They're uncomfortably aware of what black magic publicity could do for them in *Easy Rider* country. Last year at the ill-fated Altamont concert Mick Jagger had to halt half way through *Sympathy for the Devil* when violence broke out in the crowd; violence that led to the murder of one fan. After the tragedy Jagger was quoted as saying, 'Something always happens when I sing that song'.

Black Sabbath say that they are aware of the powers that are unseen and have no wish to disturb them. The next album, says Geezer, might explore completely different territory. Maybe it's best not to offer the Devil too much sympathy. After all, he doesn't need encouragement.

Black Sabbath

Uncredited writer, *Beat Instrumental*, November 1970
© Uncredited writer, 1970

Black Sabbath are very proud of the fact that the making of their latest LP, *Paranoid* took such a short time. 'We did the title track [which is also their latest single], in about ten minutes — virtually a straight run. The whole record only took a few days to produce,' says Bill Ward.

'That's just the way we work.' Continued Tony Iommi, 'Everything we do is what we feel at the time, sometimes we can play a song and it will be loud and heavy and yet at other times it could be gentle. With LPs especially, when we have a few songs to record we go into the studio and cut them, then we sit around and think up some more.'

'It's not like filling up the record with old crap,' interrupted Bill, 'it's just that when we have been in the studio for a while, the inspiration seems to be easier, new ideas just flow out.'

Originally it was intended to call the album *War Pigs* – that's why there's a photograph of a crash helmeted warrior on the sleeve. Most of the tracks are the sort of heavy sound which has made Sabbath famous, but there is one very noticeable exception, *Planet Caravan*, a rather distant 2001-ish track. The rest of the record, in common with most others of this type, needs to be listened to at high volume in order to appreciate it as it was intended.

When I asked Tony why volume was so important to the music, his reply was, as one would expect, rather straightforward: 'It's just the way we are – heavy music like ours gains a lot of the weight from volume. There's an old barn in Wales where sometimes we go to rehearse, actually it's a room belonging to Future Sound Studios. We played so loud one night that a lot of the tiles on the roof cracked and fell off.'

Singer Ozzy Osbourne continued, 'I don't know why we haven't recorded there yet, they have enough equipment up there and the guys know what they're doing. I guess it's all part of the system – we record

in London, Island and Regent to be precise. There is no reason why we shouldn't record in Wales, it really is an incredible place to work things out, no hassles, only space – we can go and piss about in the fields if we want to, that's the way it should be everywhere – open and free.'

Ever since Black Sabbath's conception and their first rise to fame they have been tagged as being a dark and mystical band. 'That's not true, we've never really done anything devilish, well... perhaps Tony has sacrificed a few too many virgins in his time, but nothing you could really call wrong.'

One point which all four feel strongly about is that not enough people listen; not to them, in particular, but to anyone.

Tony puts it into words for the others: 'So many people hear little pieces of conversations, shows, news and things, then turn round and re-tell it all wrong. Did you see *Hair*? Well that's what I mean, everyone goes to see *Hair*, they hear the songs and the music and they see the dancing but very few actually realise what the whole point and message of the show is.'

Sabbath's fame did not come overnight, although it did come rather more rapidly for them than for many other new groups. In late 1968 and 1969 they travelled from Birmingham up to Cumberland three or four times per month because that's where the majority of their fans came from. It's still the North West which supplies a vast number of Black Sabbath's followers, but the rest of the country is fast catching up.

The Wit & Wisdom of Ozzy Osbourne or for the Best Coke Call Black Sabbath

Harold Bronson, *UCLA Daily Bruin*, 30 June 1972
© Harold Bronson, 1972

'For the best coke, just ring three-eight-nine-oh-nine-eight, only one-hundred dollars!' exclaimed a very stoned Ozzy Osbourne as he grinned stupidly from behind a microphone in Studio B at Hollywood's Record Plant, where Black Sabbath are finishing up their fourth LP. 'I'm so stoned,' Ozzy moans while gesturing like Frank Sinatra.

Aside from Ozzy's ridiculous presence, the studio was more an avant-garde artist's view of a room than a musician's. A smokey-burned American flag hung on one wall while parachutes were draped on the opposite wall. The room as a whole was composed of gentle combinations of orange and red, including red tie-dyed baffles surrounding the drums.

'Look at them,' Geezer refers to the way the earphones squeeze Ozzy's brassy head. 'He looks like he's in the Guards.' Ozzy takes out this hardbound book and starts to chant lyrics in the customarily determined Sabbath style. His voice is flat – though he doesn't seem to notice – and the track has to be recorded again until he gets it right. The first verse is finished and Ozzy sings again along with the first take in order to give the (double-tracked) vocal more strength. Ozzy has trouble singing the next verse and the band agrees to take a break.

That afternoon a gregarious Mr Osbourne took time off after swimming to discuss his life as a rock star.

Who were some of your influences and what kind of music were you into before Black Sabbath?

I used to like what everybody else did: the Beatles and Rolling Stones. Geezer was into heavier things like the Mothers. We just started playing twelve-bar blues and twelve-bar jazz about four years ago.

Those influences are quite a bit different to Black Sabbath's sound.

Well, I used to like anything that was heavy. The Kinks' *You Really Got Me* did something to me, and I use to dig the early Who and Led Zeppelin. I dig anything that makes the hairs in the middle of my spine stand up. We just started writing our own stuff and our sound just evolved into what it is today – it wasn't planned.

I suppose we are similar to Grand Funk Railroad, but I hadn't heard of them until our third tour here. Nobody knew who Grand Funk were in England. We didn't realise how big they really were until we played the Forum with them and they just packed the place – two nights! They turned the crowd on, but musically they didn't do anything for me. I'm not saying they're a bum group, because they've gotta be a good group for people to dig them. Personally, I like to hear music which is considerably different than what we play.

Do you think that if you changed your music considerably you'd lose the majority of your fans?

I think everybody peaks. Not only does the crowd get pissed off of hearing the band, but the band gets tired of gigging. It's not like we're jukeboxes or records that can play for ever. When you're a new band it's like you get a tinge of stardust sprinkled on you. It's born, then accepted, and after levelling off it dies. Anything can be like that.

Our new album still has the Black Sabbath sound, but it's more melodic. Instead of me singing the guitar riff like on *Iron Man*, I'm singing different melodic things and it's all building up. Tony just composed a guitar piece with strings. It's a nice piece of music, and we wanted to write a happy song.

People call us 'downer rock'. You take the meds, man, and drink the wine and blow out, get high on the decibels – all that's a lot of rubbish. Whatever people do at our concerts is none of our business as long as they enjoy it. I'm just out to entertain people – a good old show business trip.

Yeah, so they'll be a lot of gentle things on the new album. One song, *Changes*, about a guy – whether he's with a band or not I'm not gonna say – who quits with his woman, is the ultimate in the way I feel about things. It's more of a song rather than a frustration-reliever screamer. It's just a pretty, slow ballad.

I find one of the most appealing and consistent things about your music is the lyrical commentary.

When we started writing things we didn't want to present bullshit like 'I'm gonna see my chick and we're gonna get it on.' It's all hypocritical. Let's face it, you only remember the good times because you don't wanna remember the bad. You can have a whole month of downer and only one good night and you'll remember the good night. If you feel positive, that's fine, but we wanted to write things the way they really were. Geezer furnishes most of the lyrics.

This love trip is so grossly distorted. One week you fall in love, the next week you fall out and start doing dope and blow your mind out. I don't believe there's anyone in this world who is 100 percent in love. I don't think anyone is totally happy; you can't really wake up in the morning free of hassles and do what you want as long as you don't harm anybody else. If you wanna stick needles into your arm it's your own life. Like, I'm not into taking heavy dope, although I have taken dope. People who take it just have hang-ups that they can't deal with.

If you haven't got your own mind and can't do what you want, you're not an individual, just part of a mass. The society trip in England is that you go to school, then get a job, and at the age of twenty-one you get married. You work the rest of your life in a factory and when you retire at the age of sixty-five you get a gold watch; forty-five years in a factory with stinking oil, polluting the land. I used to work in a factory and I used to see these blokes dying on their machines. That just blew my mind.

They're saying you should cut your hair and get a good job – for what? So people can suck off you? They're picking your bones,

getting all that energy out of you, when it could be put to so much better use.

But I'll tell you one thing, I've got children, and if such a day ever came, I'd dig holes to feed them. I believe in giving your children a good start and a lot of love.

Rodger Bain produced you on the albums, but now you're producing yourselves.

He was someone the record company gave us when we signed with the company. It was really a clash of egos. He got it into his head that he was more responsible for our hit status than we were. He wanted, to a moderate extent, to control our music.

Contrary to the downer aspect of your music, onstage you exude a feeling of joy.

When someone identifies with the downer song that I'm singing, they're able to put their energies into the music and relieve their frustrations. It's good therapy. If I make people feel good, I feel good. The band and the crowd gets off on each other and it's a tremendous trip: peace power. I don't wanna see people get busted on the head, I've been through that whole trip, been knifed a couple times, and it's not much fun.

A Dorito and 7-Up Picnic with Black Sabbath

Metal Mike Saunders, *Circular*, 25 September 1972
© Metal Mike Saunders, 1972

Being a slightly unreal and slightly real account of a meeting between the foreboding four and their No.1 fan, rock critic Mike Saunders, on the eve of the release of *Volume 4*, the lads' new album.

Some people might want to meet Bob Dylan. Others, if asked which rock idols they'd most like to rub elbows with, might spout off names like John Lennon, Pete Townshend, Keith Richards, Ray Davies. Feh.

Me, I was whizzing over to Griffith Park in my 1966 Chevy II to say hi to the greatest rock group in the world, the true keepers of the faith, the absolute No.1 group of the seventies so far. You know who I'm talking about as well as I do: Black Sabbath.

How it all came about was, I won the recent What Black Sabbath Means to Me contest. This, as I later found out, was a special offer included in but 500 lucky copies of *Master of Reality* pressed during December, 1971.

Fate as it were, upon acquiring my fifth new copy of *Master of Reality*, the aforementioned contest blank popped out. The instructions were a model of conciseness: 'In ten words or less, explain why you love Black Sabbath's music.' So, as the strains of *Into the Void* rumbled on, I strained my faculties for some glimmer of imagination.

I scratched my chin, looked up at my poster of Iggy and the Stooges, hummed a few Kinks' tunes, even tried conjuring up the beloved Ferocious Flintlings (better known to the world as Grand Funk) for inspiration.

Then my brother Kevin, age sixteen, looked up from his copy of *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* and said 'Black Sabbath have discovered the secret of sound.' That was it.

So anyway, as I made my way to Black Sabbath's picnic table, it was obvious that these guys were not what they were cracked up to be. There were no sacrificial victims on the table. No black cats either.

Only two of the group were wearing their silver crosses. Not a single member had fangs. I mentioned this to Ozzy Osbourne.

'Well, you know, people describe us sometimes as if we ran around fields with pitchforks in our hands. I think they expected flames to shoot out of the cover of our second album. Want some Doritos?'

This isn't the only respect in which Black Sabbath have been misinterpreted. Their first album, which for a long time gave the group the stigma of a Black Magic tag, consisted largely of tracks that were a warning against black magic – 'old business tycoons going to black magic rituals to get themselves involved with young chicks... things like that, they're sick.'

Likewise the deplorable misinterpretations of *Hand of Doom*, which in actuality is a grisly anti-heroin song: 'Take your little dose/You join the other fools/Turn to something new/Now it's killing you.../Stick the needle in.'

Black Sabbath's first LP was recorded in two days, an amazing fact in these days of $500000 Stones albums. The second, *Paranoid*, took all of a week, with the title cut written in the studio in five minutes. Tony Iommi's description of Sabbath's music is just as concise:

'We play it mainly because we like it, you know. We like what we're doing – the heavy thing. We found it was exciting and really got into it and that was it. We're pretty quick at writing; I think of a riff or melody, and the others write around it usually.'

The reason for the short studio time allotted to Sabbath's first album was that no one gives an unknown group much money to make an album with. And they were pretty unknown, as far as the media were concerned. With naive innocence, Black Sabbath all rushed out to buy the English trade papers the week their debut was released, only to find that it had been savagely attacked by all the critics.

'It really threw us,' remembers Tony, 'What had gone wrong? Were we really as bad as they said? One review of our first album must have been the worst rating ever, and we thought, "Oh, Christ. This is it." We were worried if everyone else would think the same.'

Then, the group's spirits at their lowest, the album made its surprise appearance on the charts. The rest of the Sabbath story is history, and the group hasn't paid much attention to reviews since.

Back to the business at hand, the beer was OK, Doritos a bit stale. Ozzy delighted in mugging with a 7-Up can for photographs, all in the line of maintaining his image as the face of the group.

One thing people have rarely picked up on is just where Black Sabbath's music comes from; the group is often seen as a faceless four-piece entity. Such is hardly the case. Tony Iommi is a former school bully, these days reformed, with the result that the 'aggro', as the English would call it, comes out in his guitar work (power chords at their ultimate) and song-writing. The words, on the other hand, come from bassist Geezer Butler, as Tony emphasises:

'Geezer writes most of the lyrics. Some of them are very doomy, but they vary from that to drugs and the bad things that happen sometimes with the band.'

I asked Geezer for comment on this...

'People feel evil things, but nobody ever sings about what's frightening and evil. I mean the world is a right fucking shambles. Anyway, everybody has sung about all the good things.'

So there's an element of catharsis in your music?

'Yes. We try to relieve all the tension in the people who listen to us. To get everything out of their bodies – all the evil and everything.'

One fact I wanted to check on was Tony Iommi's short-lived alliance with Jethro Tull in early 1969. What happened?

'I only stayed with Jethro Tull for three weeks. It was just like doing a nine-to-five job. The group would meet, play a gig and then split. Whereas with our group we are all good friends; we not only work as a group, but we all lived together for a long time.'

As my talk with the reigning kings of Heavy Metal rock continued, the whole moral here became quite clear; Black Sabbath are just a bunch of rock 'n' roll kids who happen to make music that, along with Grand Funk, is louder than anything ever created, and which, not

incidentally, sends our older brothers off into shrieks of anguish and condescension concerning that viperous noise we've got on the record player.

Ironic, too, that people could glorify the Stones' pretence at being 'street-fighting men,' only to cringe when the real article came along in Black Sabbath – a group from the factory job rat-race world of fists and street-fights known as Birmingham, England.

But it's all about raw, musical energy, and if Sabbath's music happens also to be a shade more vengeful and violent than any previous rock, it's because they mean what they say about releasing the tension in their audiences. With few of the trappings and affectations common to all too many groups, Black Sabbath deliver.

'Want a cheeseburger?' asked Geezer, in an unconscious mimic of the Beach Boys' 'Bull Session with the Big Daddy' classic. That about summed it all up.

Black Sabbath/Black Oak Arkansas: Black Power

Charles Shaar Murray, *NME*, 8 June 1974
© Charles Shaar Murray, 1974

If Jim Dandy's pants were any tighter they'd have hair growing out of them. Fringed suede jacket, fringed suede boots, and those white satin pants. Now, what better costume could a good ol' boy wear to tell the world that he's a mountain superstud out for some hot action?

Just watch him out there, sinking into a crouch and miming the gestures of a man frenziedly beating his meat, while flipping his elbow-length blond hair back and forth and splitting his face into a loose-lipped caricature of a lascivious leer.

Ain't nobody told Jim Dandy about how cock-rock is obsolete, phallic assertiveness is counter-revolutionary, and sexism is definitely out of the question? Sheeeit no!

Jim Dandy is Jim Mangrum.

Jim Mangrum is the lead singer with Black Oak Arkansas.

Black Oak Arkansas are this gang of hick punkolas who got started as a band by ripping off a bunch of amplifiers and P.A. equipment some eight years ago, which gives them great ideological credentials just to start with.

They'd have been off to a good start if they'd stolen enough hubcaps to actually buy the gear, but doing the gear in the first place gives them brownie points right up front.

Was it not David 'everything I wear is heavy' Bowie who said, 'the bitter comes out better on a stolen guitar'? Right on, B. Oak – everything they stole was heavy.

'We couldn't come ovah heah until mah suspended sentence wuz up' murmurs Dandy from under his Stetson as the band's coach rolls away from London's Inn on the Park Hotel on its way to Liverpool, where Black Oak are due to support Black (everything I play is heavy) Sabbath that night.

It's a nice day, The Doobie Brothers are knocking out a passable

version of 'Jesus Is Just Alright' on the tape machine, and there's wreckage aplenty for those who are that way inclined.

'It's like virgin audiences fer us ovah heah,' says Dandy, 'we doin' a pretty sho't set on this touah, so what we're doin' is givin' 'em a kinda best'a Black Oak in fawty minutes. They really dig it 'cause they mebbe ain't never seen nobody doin' whut ah'm doin' befo'...'

How are Sabbath on this tour?

'Dunno. Ain't seen 'em.'

And he ain't jivin', neither. Black Oak have their own coach to take them from gig to gig, they stay in different hotels from the Sabs, and by the time the Metal Cassandras Of Brum are due to go on the Oaks are already on their way back to the hotel.

They're hermetically sealed for your comfort and hygiene, just like the goddamn bogs at the Holiday Inns, which have little strips of paper strung across the seat just to prove that nobody's been sitting there within the last ten minutes.

'If Ah wuz just sittin' there in the audience not knowin' what to expect, and Ah saw us, Ah wouldn't know whut d'hail wuz goin' awn', volunteers lead guitarist Harvey Jett, a friendly soul with flowing brown hair and a lugubrious moustache.

Harvey's great. Ask him what he likes to read on tour, and he'll stare you right in the eye and say, 'Ah don't read much of anythin' – 'ceptin' the' Bah-ble.'

Dandy's the literary one in the band, though. 'Ah don't read too much. Ah write a lot, though. Ah'm goin' to publish a book o' mah poems'n stories. Wanna 'nother beer, y'all?'

And he strides, whistling, over to the fridge to haul out a whole passell of beers and cokes.

This is as good a time as any to introduce the band and its adjuncts to y'all, so step right up and shake hands.

First up is Tommy Aldridge, who looks almost like Roger Daltrey. He beats out that pagan debbil rhythm on the drums, and is the band's most recent member, having been with them a paltry three years.

Then there's bass player Pat Doherty, known for some reason as 'Dirty', even though to all appearance he's quite spectacularly clean, fresh and sweet-smelling – actually Dirty ain't on the coach, having been laid up with a peculiarly virulent form of gastric flu. He'll be headin' on down to Liverpool later – or so everybody hopes.

Then there's Harvey, who you've already met.

The other lead guitarist is Stanley Knight, known as 'Goober' for reasons that I hardly dare to contemplate, and the rhythm guitar (lotta guitars in that sentence) is responsibly overseen by a gentleman named Rick Reynolds, who looks like Edgar Broughton would if somebody decided to clean up his image.

Ladies and gentlemen, Black Oak Arkansas.

With the band are two roadies and their manager, Butch Stone. A third roadie is back with Pat.

Stone is an amiable fellow in denims and cowboy boots with – you guessed – long 'air and a squashed-in face. Then there's Sparky, who looks like Stanley, and Lil' Dave. The reason they call him Lil' Dave, y'see, is that he's about eight feet tall, with a scrubby beard and a black Stetson.

Legends surround this titanic figure like mist wreathing the mountains of Arkansas. Like the time when Lil' Dave spotted an elderly fellow in a black serge suit backstage at one of their first British gigs and enquired as to the gentleman's identity. On being informed that the mystery man was a jobsworth, he raised his voice and bellowed, 'HEY, JOBSWORTH...!

How could you help liking a man like that?

Now, the thing you gotta understand about Black Oak is that they really are just a happy bunch of mountain boys playing rock and roll just to get out and have themselves a real ol' time, y'all.

'Ain't nobody in this band gonna go out and buy themselves no Ma-se-ra-tis. We're mo' lahkly to spend our bread on – uh – tractors and motorbikes and Arabian horses.'

Black Oak gig something like 300 nights a year back home, and

they go out for between ten and fifteen grand a night. That's a lotta greenbacks, and you might be forgiven for wondering where it all goes.

Well, bub, it goes straight back into the land. Black Oak's local community has just received its first school – courtesy of the band – which is pretty good going for a bunch of loony hicks who got busted for ripping off a sound system.

'Ah just got me this Arabian hoss. Ah'm thinkin' o' puttin' me up a big ol' sign, sayin' "Jim Dandy's Stud Service".' This line is delivered with a big lip-smacking haw-haw grin. Dandy, y'see, is something of a lady's man. Ask him a question – like where somebody happened to be – and he'll say, 'Well, Ah dunno, man, Ah wuz in mah room screwin'' And damn if he wasn't too.

'Hell, boy, Ah've had all kinds, all shapes, all sahzes, all colours, all nationalities – n'boy, Ah think it's tahm ah started goin' for quahlity, stead o' quahn-tity.'

Whew, the soul of a poet spread bare before our very eyes.

Most of the guys in band call Jim 'JD' (which also stands in American usage for 'Juvenile Delinquent', but I'm sure that's merely the reactive mind talkin').

Dandy's a really nice cat. A faaaahn dude. He's just never realised what a freak he is. I mean, listen to him now, rapping on about how he's gonna be a movie star in a few years. Now what kind of movie can you build around Jim Dandy? However, you don't want to bring him down, so you just say 'Yeah, Jim' and change the subject.'

Anyway, let's get moving and do a fast segue to Black Oak's entry on stage at Liverpool. Now, just like anybody else, they use introductory music, but they don't have any of this classical blaargh. No way. They use the introductory music from The Godfather.

So up come the lights and the band are there churning it out, complete with Pat, who eventually got there feeling dreadful since doctors warned him off eating anything at all, which doesn't hang him up unduly since the band all think that British food is hideous.

It's rumoured that Doherty got sick after eating no less than four helpings of fish and chips in Bradford, which represents an overdose of potentially massive proportions. Gastric flu, hell – men have died under less.

So anyway on comes Dandy, strutting around with his pelvis (who says this paper ain't got no delicacy?) stuck out and his eyes bugging like cherries at the boiling point.

Every so often he does a whip-up high-kick that just misses a guitar player's head, or comes within a whisker of decapitating Pat Doherty's mike stand. He looks like some muscle-bound bull-moose dragged up as Buffalo Bill's old lady, and his dancing seems more of a display of sexual muscle than anythin' else.

There's none of the grace of a Jagger or a Bowie in what Dandy does, but on the other hand there's stuff he has going that they don't.

Sometimes he pulls off some good stunts like an effortless double split and back up right on the beat for the segue of *Mutants of the Monster* or spreading his legs, dropping his ass to floor level and twitching. No wonder he buys those pants in units of six.

Tonight he's gonna split 'em right down the back during the last number. It's just as well that it's the end of the set, 'cause there ain't nuthin' under those pants but Jim Dandy's natural self (asserting itself quite dramatically at times, too).

The fringed jacket comes off during the second number, and from then on there's no holding the boy. I remember the days when singers used to hang about looking embarrassed during the solos – in fact, I once saw Ashley Holt actually leave the stage for fifteen or twenty minutes at a time during a Warhorse set while the guitar and keyboard players went through their paces.

None of that for Jim Dandy – no sireebob. In fact, he's more fun to watch when he isn't singing than when he is.

Singing – yeah, right. He does sing too, folks. How negligent of me. You know that grungy basso rasp that Beefheart uses sometimes and Edgar Broughton uses sometimes and Dennis Locorriere from

Dr. Hook uses sometimes? Well, Dandy sounds like that all the time.

He's great to watch, staggering around the stage with the demented horny leer, advertising his ass. At time it seems Black Oak's entire stage act is a gigantic conspiracy to get Dandy laid as many times a day as possible.

The band ain't killers, but they're good. You won't find much of it on their *High on the Hog* album, but their *Raunch 'n' Roll* live epic (unreleased on this side of the culture gap laughingly referred to as the Atlantic) allegedly gets it all down adequately enough.

It's good quality Grade B southern metal, nice and tight, with Harvey and Goober doing some nice lead trade-offs in front of Reynolds' chunky rhythm guitar. They even do this loony a cappella version of *I Wish I Was In Dixie*, before rampaging into an instrumental tear up of it which doesn't sound the least bit like the way Duane Eddy did it.

During this one Dandy gets his washboard out. You can't hear the bleeding thing which doesn't matter much since it's more of a visual prop anyway. Ol' J.D. just sticks it in his crotch and gives it the old massage job.

Probably the biggest energy rush in the whole set is Tommy Aldridge's drum solo. Yeah, I know drum solos are usually nothing but an excuse for the drummer to play all the licks he can't squeeze into anything else, but Aldridge's solo is a completely different bucket of carp.

It's basically a steady accelerando on one lick, extremely disciplined and genuinely funky. Behind the amps, the rest of the band are fanning him with towels and cheering him on as the finest flowering of Liverpudlian youth are going quite spectacularly dementoid.

He ends the solo by knocking over as much of his kit as he can while still leaving himself enough percussibles to finish off the set.

Why, Tommy, why? Tell me why, Tommy. Please.

'Well, Ah did it one tahm and people dug it, so I'm doin' it on purpose naow.'

Doesn't it mean that you end up totalling rather a lot of cymbals?

Shrug. 'Sure.'

Tumulturama. Back out fo' d'encore, which is (of course) the band's current single, Jim Dandy. More tumulturama, more twitching by Dandy. Off.

(There now follows a brief intermission in which the reporter moves his attention in the general direction of Black Sabbath. Black Oak Arkansas will be back late on in the show, folks. Hang about).

Up at the front, the audience are squashed up against the crash barrier. The ritual cry of 'Sab-baff! Sab-baff!' is just beginning. One of the kids opines that Black Oak are better than Black Sabbath and gets shouted down for his pains.

So on they trot, Bill Ward, looking like the Incredible Hulk with a beard, shambling over to his drum kit in black tights (Ward, not the drums, dolt!), Geezer Butler the sensuous spastic, Tony Iommi short-haired and emanating an enviable degree of moustachioed deadpan cool, and Ozzy himself, fetchingly attired in one of those kung fu shirts that Our Bruce seems to have popularised among the movie-going rock public.

Peace signs are exchanged, and the Sabs get down to business. Immediately, the kids are transfixed. Arms waving, faces contorted, the ones at the front are mashed right up against the barricades. One kid who can't be a micro-second over thirteen is pinned up so tight that his torso is hanging over and down, and he can't even push himself back far enough to be able to stand up straight. So a security man does it for him.

During Black Oak's act, the stage is lit so that nobody except Jim Dandy can be seen particularly clearly, and ol' JD is front and centre. With the Sabs, however, poor Ozzy has the mike stashed away on the right hand side of the stage, and he stays there except when he stomps around to do his cheer leader bit.

What a performer. Makes Nureyev look like an average grape-treader.

And Tony Iommi – you can tell that he's a serious musician. While Geezer Butler's having convulsions, Iommi just stands there, eyes cast heavenward, occasionally pursing his lips during the hard bits. Sometimes he – oh, wow – sometimes he starts a Townshend arm-swing and then thinks better of it.

Ward just gets sweaty and flails around in diligent impersonation of an octopus that's just been plugged into a top secret section of Battersea Power Station.

The music is – c'mon, who needs another Sabbaff piss-take? They're obviously doing something right, and the time has come to make a real effort and find out exactly what it is.

First off, most of their songs describe Ozzy's vision of the awesome dangers confronting the planet, and their eventual defeat by the forces of love and unity – plus plenty of fortitude, natch. Yer basic Dennis Wheatley light v. darkness tag-match, in fact.

The band don't so much play their instruments as operate them, and the general effect is that of a steam roller that can't get out of first gear.

The thing is that Ozzy's setting the scene, describing the forces of evil (as in the classic opening couplet from *War Pigs*: 'Generals huddle in their masses/just like witches at black masses'. Shakespeare lives, already), while the music – presumably – represents the menaces that Ozzy's trying to combat. Which may explain why his plangent whine is almost entirely swamped by the methodical plodding of the instruments.

Their music is approximately as dynamic as a hippo hauling itself out of a swamp, but it's loud as hell. The riffs are totally unvarying, except when Iommi does a solo (he's got three: mock jazz, mock flamenco and superspeed skiderama).

Where it works best is on '*Iron Man*', a song allegedly about a lonely robot, where the Sabs manage to capitalise on their limitations skilfully enough to produce something genuinely awesome.

The atmosphere they produce is sump'n else as well. Ward's drum solo is a complete and utter shambles compared to the sustained

violence and breathtaking control of Aldridge's, but his random thumps and rolls add up to a roar of pain and frustration. 'Let-me-out! Let-me-out!' it says, and the cycle is completed when they come out for the encore.

'Whaddya wanna hear?' yells Ozzy, and the crowd roar back with perfect precision: 'PARANOID!!'

Ever hear 3000 people all yelling 'Paranoid!' at one time? Not so much a song title, more a way of life.

With that, let us draw a discreet veil over Sabbaff, and return post-haste to the Holiday Inn in Liverpool's aptly named Paradise Street where, during a conversation with Jim, I discover that we share a common liking for the works of speculative fantasist Roger Zelazny.

Jim's read *Lord of Light* and *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, so I recommend him the same author's *Jack of Shadows*.

'We got t' get t'gether, m'man,' quoth JD, 'and have us a lil' talk 'bout books.' However, we never do. In fact, we git t'gether and have us a lil' talk about poozy. We start talking about young women who are unable to supply the kind of spiritual and intellectual stimulation that the better class of young man requires.

The rest of this conversation could get us busted, so let's skid crazily onwards to JD's reaction when asked if being a support group made it necessary for them to work harder.

Blank stare. 'Well – we always trah to do ouah bayest – no matter who's on befo' us or who's on aftuh. We don't know how to do it no othuh way.'

What a nice bunch of lads. Friendly and sincere, too. 'Hey – wheah yew bin in th' States? Awwww, New York, LA – yew just bin t' the awmpits, bro'. If yew evah in Arkansaw, yew c'mon up an' give us a cawl. Well be mighty glad t'see y'll anytime...'

Yeah, thanks Jim. 'S'bin a reeeeaal pleasure bein' with y'all.

Ladies and gentlemen – Black Oak Arkansas.

Sabbath's Sabotage: An Interview with Tony Iommi

Mick Houghton, *Circus*, October 1975
© Mick Houghton, 1975

Three tiers of gold, silver and platinum discs span one wall of the snooker room. They provide irrefutable evidence of the worldwide success of Black Sabbath — and guitarist Tommy Iommi.

The room itself is part of Iommi's lavish Georgian country house, once owned by a renowned English family. The house lies outside a quiet Leicestershire village where no one would suspect one of rock's leading metallurgists takes refuge. His name is on all the awards, well, more or less. It's invariably misspelled — Lommi, Lammi and other approximations. He's not too concerned about it. Maybe it's just the hard fact that the discs are only symbols and that the royalty cheques themselves can be cashed all right? No, that's unfair, the splendour in which he lives somehow belies the fact that Tony Iommi is basically a down-to-earth sort of guy, even slightly embarrassed by his surroundings.

He's a joker — churning out a series of silly quips that have a way of shattering any notes of over-seriousness that might intrude into the conversation. 'It's a very clean sound,' this reporter said while Tony played through the tapes of *Sabotage*, the new album. 'Oh yeah,' he replied totally straight-faced 'I only washed the tapes this morning.' He's also a practical joker, alarming his publicist by quietly remarking that Bill Ward the drummer was quitting the band. He isn't of course though well he might since Bill is so often the butt of Tony Iommi's prankish personality quirks.

It's been a favourite sport of critics to decry Black Sabbath's enormous financial success. It's been easy to glibly castigate them on the grounds that their appeal is pure unadulterated fan madness, and that audience communication is now based on a lie, since they live like rich hermits, cut off from the worshipping concert hordes. But that criticism itself is false. It's not that Sabbath is now vague and far removed from their

fans, but that their elevated status is actually part of the 'mechanics of fulfillment' in the rock 'n' roll dream. It's the make-believe world that the working-class lads from Aston in Birmingham — the bad side of town — set out to attain seven years ago. But the dream eventually comes face to face with reality and that's when the cracks start to appear. So the time came around a year ago for Black Sabbath to set their house in order.

The break has been a sabbatical in fact—a real one — coming in their seventh year since formation as Earth back in Birmingham. In that time they have progressed from being one of several hundred local British bands scurrying round flea-pit clubs to become a headline act capable of packing out any venue prepared to stage them. Along the way they had begun to feel like figures on a balance sheet — part of the profit and loss account.

The upheaval within their management, WWA, gave them the chance to come to grips with the business side of their enterprise, to recapture a grasp of the reins they had dropped once the figures on the balance sheet notched their way to six figures and beyond. They took their chance and are now managing themselves and forming their own publishing company.

Tony commented on what it means for the group: 'Obviously by managing ourselves we have more control over what is happening and for us as individuals it is another angle to get involved in. We are learning by having to think about sides of the business which we didn't concern ourselves with in the past. It gives us a broader outlook because we can do whatever we want now. We have a direct channel so that if we want to arrange a tour or whatever we don't have to go through our management before it gets to us. It's one and the same. Any decisions are taken by all four of us and we all have to be fully behind them.

'The position we are in now we don't have to accept anything and nobody gets fooled and nobody can turn around and call us anything unless they have the right to do so. In the past we have been blamed

for things which weren't down to us. There were gigs we didn't turn up to in America where we didn't know there was a gig. We weren't told about them. It happened a few times and eventually it came back to us because we're the ones people see up there on stage.'

Did this explain some unfavourable remarks and mixed feelings over experiences in America that Ozzy expressed in the past?

'The reason we haven't been happy about some of our American tours was because our organization hadn't set things up properly.' Tony expounded. 'The planning that was needed just wasn't there and it was all one mad rush so that we drove ourselves to a standstill. Promoters were left in the dark — we were left in the dark. Often we'd have no time to rehearse and it became like trial and error going on the road, at times.'

The aim of the new structure is to avoid making tours such a grind, arranging all commitments to suit everyone right through to the road crews. As Tony sees it, by taking on the business aspects the band isn't adding to its responsibilities since in the long run it should ease all the unseen pressures of any successful rock band. The pressures had taken their toll on Sabbath's feeling for their music, and became another urgent reason for escaping from the public eye. 'We were just suffering too much strain and worry and we just had to stop and sort ourselves out. Touring had become a bit like working in a factory — we lost sight of what we were doing. It got to the point where we were getting bored with our show. At various times the band were ill [Tony himself collapsed at the Hollywood bowl last year with a nervous breakdown — while Bill was suffering from hepatitis] as well as just feeling rough and exhausted. The break has done us good because we really needed to get back into playing.'

In true post-Traffic tradition they have been indulging in the proverbial getting-it-together-in-the-country.

'We've all been regaining ourselves. A few years ago we wouldn't have dreamed of going down to the pub for a pint and simple things like that.' And they mixed their period of mending shattered nerves

and psyches with learning business acumen and recording the new *Sabotage* (on Warner). There were a few snags with the cover which delayed release until late July by which time they had launched one of three shortish American tours, three tours to avoid the treadmill of one long haul. 'By 1973 we were thinking that we could go on stage and simply because we were Black Sabbath we couldn't do anything wrong. We were getting away from music because we were working so hard. We weren't really manipulated, but we were just feeling we were.'

On these fresh new tours a fifth musician will be taking the stage with them. Gerald Woodruffe, a keyboard player, will not be playing along with *Paranoid* but Sabbath needs him to augment their live sound in light of Tony's increasing practice of overdubbing in the studio.

Spokesmen for the seventies? Even as they are a logical extension of the British mid-sixties rock trip, Sabbath are a true seventies band. They relate to the sixties, not like Zeppelin or The Who — the culmination of the sixties ethos — nor like Bad Company — the continuum of sixties R&B and blues.

Sabbath are a natural outgrowth, picking up on Cream riffs, but disdaining excessive virtuoso soloing for reliance on the power chord structure. More than Zeppelin, or Purple or Quo, they geared their sound and their message to the demands of the then emergent post-sixties generation, an age group more introspective, emotionally depressed and sophisticated than the sixties rockers. Those weaned on Beatles and Stones could only find in Sabbath's music tedium ad infinitum, and in their image a total lack of friendly bravado or revolutionary ardour.

But for the younger set, Sabbath generated an excitement and a dark manic truth. They maintained a strong group identity, shrugging off attempts to push Ozzy, for example, before the other members, and a sound more monolithic than any rock 'n' roll that preceded it, a sound forged to a brittle metallic roar. The sound corresponded to the visions of hell, heaven and 1984 the lyrics evoked.

Sabbath haven't, as some think, stood still as a musical force. Although they have been viewed as the best of the crass (heavy metal kitsch) rock exponents, and their musical growth hasn't been as spectacular or surrounded in potential greatness as Zeppelin's, it is revealing a surprising development as the metal rusts away.

Sabbath have the skills to build a wider structure of music on their solid foundation and to appeal to an audience beyond their third generation crowd. If in fact the heavy metal audience is shrinking, in *Sabotage* the Birmingham boys have an album of sufficient intricacy and internal dynamics to extend beyond the limits of heavy metal acceptance.

Sabotage picks up some of the diversity which had blossomed on *Volume 4*. That diversity had abruptly narrowed on Sabbath, Bloody Sabbath, when the band had returned to its preoccupations with the grim battles of good vs. evil which the cover depicted in the gruesome nightmare sequence. That album, it seemed, had taken Sabbath's moral paranoia to the farthest limits of their imagination. Next to that opus, how did Tony feel about *Sabotage*?

'It's more of a basic rock album, really in the same way that all the albums up to *Master of Reality* were, but we've taken a lot more care in the way this one is produced. We spent a lot of time on *Volume 4* and Sabbath, Bloody Sabbath but they were moving away from a oneness of approach. *Volume 4* was such a complete change we felt we had jumped an album really. It didn't follow suit because we had tried to go too far and again Sabbath, Bloody Sabbath was a continuation from it. We could have gone on into more technical things and fulfill a lot the band is capable of achieving and which we don't necessarily do on stage either. But we decided we had reached the limit as far as we wanted to go.'

Did that mean that the band were consciously arresting their development and selling themselves short to pander to the whims of their fans?

'Oh no – we've always got to be satisfied with what we are doing ourselves. We don't just play for our audience to satisfy them. We play

to satisfy ourselves but we hope that communicates to our audience and that it satisfies them. We haven't held back because we've thought we are getting too involved – you can't put yourself in that kind of position we felt we wanted to get back to a more basic thing. We'll pick up again and develop from *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* but that will come later when we are more ready for it.'

The 'back to basics rock' isn't too shattering a reversal. Rather the band has succeeded in inter-meshing more light and shade within individual tracks, most notably on one called *Symphony of the Universe* with a tranquil opening leading into a melodic tour de force that shifts tempo neatly and precisely as it races to a conclusion. There's plenty of more familiar heavy metal to please the hard and heavy corps. *Megalomania* is one and another, penned by Ozzy, rejoices in the title *Am I Really Insane?*

The most surprising track is one called *Supertzar*. It was written by Tony in the immaculate confines of his living room with him playing guitar and his wife Sue the orchestral harp. It's transformed on the album to a song vaguely reminiscent of the classic Yardbirds song *Still I'm Sad* by additional vocal parts from a chamber choir. A more telling track is one called *The Writ*, documenting the various managerial and business confrontations the band has suffered. It's a new departure — can you imagine such a song on *Paranoid* or *Master of Reality*? It's just one piece of evidence of their changing lyrical preoccupations reflecting a growing self-awareness and confidence.

Sabbath's lyrical obsessions in the past have trademarked their unique quality. There has been a lyrical thread running through their work that has set them apart from their heavy metal peers. It's a conceptual thread that seems to be tacitly accepted by their followers without comment but which has been seized upon by many critics, especially in Britain, as naive and banal. The tacit audience acceptance of the gritty message is another key to their enormous success. In the churning chordal music of bone-marrow-crushing concert they expressed the hopes and fears of a new generation. 'They're tired of being pushed

around and told just what to do/They'll fight the world until they've won and love comes shining through.' It's a common enough streak of youthful defiance, but usually Sabbath set up the practitioners and tenets of evil – pollution, wars, sin, hate, hard drugs – then offered not revolution or solution, but escape be it religion (*After Forever*), soft drugs (*Sweet Leaf*), or fantasy (*Into the Void* or the marvellous *Supernaut*). *Master of Reality* paints the picture in vivid black and white. *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* says it more intelligently because in the underpinning of that album lies the real solution – self-belief and acceptance of reality.

Tony agreed that in the past their lyrics represented what might be described as a teenage vision: 'I've always regarded it as important that people should pick up on the words – they're not just functional. The lyrics are about things that have happened to us – or dreams – or stages that we've been through. They're true for a lot of people who are actually experiencing them or have yet to go through them. They've felt whatever emotion – depression or whatever – and can relate the words to how they feel. Younger kids especially can latch on to what there is and realise that there is somebody else who has been through it. With *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* everything was said – on the whole it summed up everything we had done over the years. This album (*Sabotage*) is like starting again – like the music, the lyrics aren't so technical.'

I'd always found the escapist odes like *Supernaut* the most acceptable of Sabbath's answers to all that doom and despondency. And those like *Iron Man* all suggested an interest in science fiction.

'I don't read science fiction – well some people may call it science fiction, but I believe it. Lobsang Rampa's writings about astral travelling and the next life. I believe there is a next life. It's easy to be sceptical but I understand a lot and get a lot out of reading his books. Geezer, who wrote most of the songs in the past, was into this kind of thing long before me and I think the influence is in some of those songs.'

Did it upset Tony then when Sabbath's lyrics were written off as too simple and naive, even though they were obviously highly personal?

'It annoys me,' Tony responded, 'I don't write the words but I know the wavelength Geezer is on. In fact the whole group communicates on a very close level. Like, we have what you could almost call a third eye. We can sense with each other what is going to happen. We've had actual experiences. One I remember, Geezer was asleep and he must have astral travelled. I was stuck in the lift. He dreamt this and when I woke him up he said "I'm glad it's you 'cause I just dreamt you were stuck in the lift." These are quite regular occurrences. They used to frighten me at first till I got used to it.'

The Second Coming of Black Sabbath (According to Geezer Butler)

Dave Thompson, *The Rocket*, 1994
© Dave Thompson, 1994

It wasn't always this way, you know. There was a time when, if you mentioned that you liked Black Sabbath... if you mentioned that your band was influenced by Black Sabbath, you'd be run out of town on a hot rail to hell. The most unfashionable band in the world, the most hated, the most hateful, the best reviews Black Sabbath ever got were the ones that never saw print.

Thoughtfully, Geezer Butler recalls, 'for years, we went around thinking we were shit, and wondering why we bothered. We knew our fans liked us, but everyone else... the press hated us, said we couldn't write, couldn't play... other bands hated us, everyone. It wasn't until all the 'new' metal bands like Iron Maiden and Saxon started coming through in the early 1980s that we actually heard anyone say we'd had any impact at all.'

And today? Say you don't like Sabbath and you're dead meat. It's one of life's quirks, but one which Kiss, at least, would vouch for as well. It doesn't matter how much your peers and the press despise you, sooner or later, your fans will grow up. And when they do... Forget Chuck Berry and the Beatles, if you want to hear the heartbeat of nineties rock'n'roll, dig out your copy of *Paranoid*, and go to track four. Go to *Iron Man*. Even if they'd split the next day, *Iron Man* would have ensured Sabbath's immortality. The heaviest riff in history is also the simplest and the most contagious... even Beavis and Butthead know the words; they go 'bam bam bam-bam-bam bam-bam-bam-bam-bam-bam bam bam bam.' And Geezer Butler smiles, because he wrote them. 'Not the bam bam ones, though. The others. The ones Ozzy sang.' Ah, same difference.

It sounds dumb, but Black Sabbath are a 1990s institution. Beyond heavy metal, beyond their much-publicised dalliance with witchcraft,

beyond all that, Sabbath have been around so long it's actually easy to forget to even get excited about them. *Cross Purposes* is their latest album, and how many have passed since you last picked one up? Five? Six? You should be ashamed.

There again, a lot of blood has flowed under the altar since the days when a new Sabbath album was an Earth-shattering event; the years have fled (Sabbath are twenty-five this year), and so have the members. Ozzy, Dio, Gillan, Ward... at one point, guitarist Tony Iommi was making solo albums under the Sabbath name. Even bassist Butler quit in 1985, only returning two years ago; the rest of Sabbath's modern soul enfolds ex-Rainbow drummer Bobby Rondinelli, and vocalist Tony Martin – who has now sung on more albums (four) than anyone since Ozzy.

Of his own departure, Butler explains: 'When Gillan joined [in 1983], the idea was to be a non-Black Sabbath band, with a non-Black Sabbath album. Change the sound, change the name, everything. [Gillan-Iommi-Butler-Ward was one possibility.] Then the record company turned round and said 'it's a Sabbath album', and... I just thought we'd been misled. So I worked my way through the tour, then left.'

He spent 'four years at home with my kids', then joined Ozzy Osborne's band. 'That started me off again, so when we finished Ozzy's tour, I got back with Tony.' *Dehumanizer* became the closest thing to a traditional Sabbath album in years.

There again, what was the traditional Sabbath? Mention their best-known background, and Butler visibly squirms. 'Even at the beginning, when everyone was calling us devil worshippers, I didn't think we had a Satanic image. It was a dark name, Black Sabbath, but the songs were never promoting Satanism.

'I was brought up an incredibly strict Catholic, and believed in hell and the devil. But though I'd been taught about God and Jesus, no-one ever went into what the devil was all about, so when I was sixteen or seventeen, I went about trying to find out. And because

I wrote most of Black Sabbath's lyrics, some of that ended up in the songs.' And again he insists, 'But it was never advocating Satanism. It was warning against evil.'

He's right, too. Reread the lyrics (and this time, pay attention). Then tell me, when was the last time you caught a Satanist wearing a crucifix – the right way up? Sabbath were gloomy, but they were positive-gloomy, because even if the world does end in a nuclear flash, while we ascend to heaven, the generals will burn in hell. You wanna talk morality? *War Pigs* makes *Star Trek* look twisted.

Things haven't changed today, and though Sabbath still boast a Flying Satan logo, the little guy's name is Henry. That's how seriously they take it... about as seriously as they take the on going Ozzy reunion gossip. 'If it was going to happen,' says Butler, 'it would have happened two years ago. All the hard work was done, getting back together. It was easy after that, but at the last minute, Ozzy changed his mind and that was it. It won't happen now.'

Any regrets?

'Since you ask, yes. It would have been great for the young fans who never saw us; great for the older ones who remember us, and great for us, because we'd have got a couple of million dollars.'

Right now, the biggest payday on the horizon is the Sabbath box set (a coffin! It has to be a coffin!) Which Warner are planning for later this year, and *Crossed Purposes*.

'I like the new album because we didn't mess around,' enthuses Butler. 'We recorded the whole thing in six weeks. But of course, if you'd told me twenty-five years ago that we'd spend six weeks recording an album, I'd have laughed. Our first one was done in two days. You try telling an engineer you want to do it in two days today, and he'll think you mean threading the tape.' He sighs, sadly. 'Even the tea-boys don't move that fast!'

BLACK SABBATH

MUSIC LEGENDS